

Out of the Blue, Into the Black by trashmovthtoziers

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Genre: F/M, M/M

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Demogorgon (Stranger Things), Dustin Henderson, Eddie Kaspbrak, Holly Wheeler, Jonathan Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Hanlon, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Pennywise (IT), Richie Tozier, Richie Tozier's Parents, Sonia Kaspbrak, Stanley Uris, Steve Harrington, Ted Wheeler, The Losers Club (IT), Will Byers

Relationships: Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Maxine "Max" Mayfield & Richie Tozier, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Richie Tozier & Mike Wheeler, Richie Tozier & Stanley Uris, Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

Richie Tozier uncovers secrets about his family and an identical twin brother of which he never even knew he had. When the threat of another cosmic, other-worldly being resurfaces in Hawkins— Richie with previous knowledge on such being— he feels obliged to help his brother and his friends in its defeat.

"IT came to here for a reason. IT came here for me."

1. the house at the end of the cul-de-sac

Author's Note:

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Notes for the Chapter:

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RICHIE TOZIER blinked—once, twice, thrice. It was all that he knew how to do at that moment, even if it was involuntary. The suburban house at the end of the cul-de-sac loomed almost menacingly over him, looking to be almost a thousand feet tall from where he was standing, shivering on the front doorstep. The mid-October wind bit at his face, causing an intense flood of crimson to reach the apples of his cheeks. His freckles, which he had for some reason loathed for as long as he could remember, stood out starkly on their newfound crimson palette, appearing strangely like small splatters of paint several shades darker than their background.

He was shocked that he had made it this far. He reminded himself that he would probably never gather the courage to do this again, so he would have to do it now, while he was already there. He would have to find it in himself to face them.

He hiked his backpack, which was full of nearly everything that he owned, fully onto his shoulder. He had accidentally broken the zipper on the bus-ride to Hawkins, so, in an ill-considered attempt to not lose all of his belongings, he decided that duct-tape would have to be the solution. He must have looked rather unfortunate with his cold-bitten face, disheveled hair, mud-encrusted sneakers, and, of course, his backpack of which had been fixed precariously with a single piece of peeling adhesive duct-tape.

He looked down at his white, muddied sneakers (which were now an unpleasant shade of brown); at the welcome mat underneath them.

He wondered distantly if he would, in fact, be welcomed here. He had come all this way to Hawkins for this reason—to meet them; to

placate his mother— so he wondered if he had made the right decision by listening and eventually obeying what his mother had asked of him before she passed.

(If something happens to me, Rich, which it probably will, I want you to find my sister and her family. My sister will take you in if she hears that something has happened. We promised that we would.)

Richie didn't exactly know what she meant when she had said 'We promised that we would', but he supposed that it had to do with some sort of sisterly promise to where his aunt would take him in if the worst were to happen to both his mother and father. Well, it had happened. And here he was, two-thousand miles away from home.

He wouldn't truly know if this was all worth it if he didn't make an attempt to find out, so he did.

He lifted his hand and knocked softly on the door— three times. Such confidence shocked him, but he didn't complain, for meeting long-lost family required an abundance of that. After a few moments, and over the sound of his heart thudding loudly in his ears, he heard faint footsteps coming from inside.

The doorknob turned and was soon pushed forward. An irritated man stood there, his brown, somewhat-silver hair slicked back in an odd-looking quiff. Despite how late it was— almost 11 o'clock in the evening— he wore an emerald turtleneck sweater and crumpled corduroy slacks. Just like Richie, he had on coke-bottle specs of which magnified his eyes ridiculously. The man blinked several times, then scowled, "Michael? What the hell are you doing outside?"

The man, having obviously confused him for someone else, snatched hold of his forearm and yanked him inside of the house, nearly dislocating his shoulder as he did so. He slammed the door shut behind him. "Get off that ridiculous costume!" The man scolded a bewildered/scared Richie, rather forcefully ripping the specs off of his face, which had, in turn, thrown his world off-kilter.

Richie tried to tell this man that he was mistaken, had confused him for someone else, and that he didn't know who this 'Michael' character was, but he had never been allowed the chance to do

so. The man continued, just as angry, "Did you climb through your window again?"

"I'm not M—"

"You *know* that your mother won't be proud of this—you sneaking off. I'd bet *anything* that your snuck off to some *girl's* house! You better explain yourself before your mother sees you!"

Finally, Richie had his chance to confess of who he really was. He said with some force, "Sir, I'm not who you think that I am! I don't know who 'Michael' is. My name is Richie... uh, not Michael."

For several moments— moments which seemed to stretch for *hours*— the man said nothing. In his shock, he held the specs loosely in his hands almost to the point where they would fall and shatter on the polished hardwood. "Richie?" the man asked thoughtfully. *This was it*, Richie thought. "As in Richard? Your name is Richard?" he reiterated.

As the man scrutinized him closely, there was something in his eyes — something *intimidating*— that made Richie feel as if he were being carefully studied underneath a microscope. "Yes, sir..." he answered, voice laced with timidity. It seemed that the word 'sir' had shoved its way into his everyday vocabulary. His skin felt too tight, like it had been stretched onto his bones. "Richie To—"

Before Richie could finish introducing himself and provide some clarity on the situation, the man had reacted. "KAREN!" he suddenly screamed, causing Richie to start in surprise, his heart hammering madly now. *This really is happening*, he thought.

"Look, I understand that this is batshit *crazy*, but if I could please have my glass—?"

A woman rushed into the entrance room mere seconds after she had been called. From the look on her face, she must have assumed the worst. "Yes, Ted?" she demanded frantically, frightened eyes scanning the room for any possible threats. "What happened?"

Then, her eyes fell on Richie. He stood beside her husband, glasses-

less and now closely resembling someone that she knew very well. She nearly fainted out of shock. In fact, she stumbled backward as if she were, but managed to catch the wall behind her and use it to support her madly trembling legs.

Remembering what his mother had told him, Richie assumed that this woman was his mother's sister— his aunt. He realized that she must have been overwhelmed and, in the supposed terms of the promise with his mother, she must have realized, as she saw Richie, that the worst had happened to her sister. He had *half*-expected her to burst into tears, mourning the sudden loss of her sister, but she did nothing of the sort. Instead, she breathed out in shock, "*Richie...*"

He could not see the expression on her face, his bare, glasses-less vision was too fucked, but he suspected that she was overwhelmed and confused and, well, *shocked*. As a last resort, he squinted horribly, hoping that she would notice his trouble and coax the man to return his specs.

She noticed promptly enough. "Give him his glasses, Ted. For Chrissakes..." she said to the man, and he did as he was told. He carefully placed the specs into Richie's outstretched hands, somewhat red-faced, obviously rather embarrassed to have mistaken him for someone else. The moment that Richie shoved his specs onto his face, his world was descended in near-perfect clarity (he would need a new prescription soon).

As he could now see the inside of the house for the first time, he took several moments to simply *take in* his surroundings:

The woman was also dressed rather nicely despite the late hour, for she wore a maroon blouse and brown, pinstriped trousers. Her chestnut brown hair had been coiled and coiffed, curling outward at the shoulders. He realized that he didn't look much like this woman, despite them being family, for her hair was of a much more vibrant shade than his, but he did notice one similarity— their eyes. He realized with precise clarity that his late mother had the same ones.

As Richie looked about the entrance room, he let it all sink in. However, breaking his distinct train of thought, was the sound of footsteps from the level above. "What the *heck* is going on down

there?" someone called, the demand resounding from one end of the house to the other. The footsteps neared, and soon, the cause made an appearance.

There, halfway down the staircase, overlooking the entrance room and the occupants of it, stood an especially disheveled-looking teenage girl, her cocoa-brown hair sticking out almost comically in all directions. As expected for almost 11 o'clock in the evening, and unlike the man and the woman, she wore pajamas, socks, and white slippers. Then, she noticed Richie and froze completely, her hands still wrapped around the wooden rails of the staircase.

Then, another set of footsteps approached from behind her. These were fainter somehow, almost nonexistent, presumably the sound of sock-clad feet against hardwood. The owner of these footsteps, came to an immediate halt beside the girl, for he had seen what (who) was down in the entrance room.

It was... Well, it was *himself!*

It could've been his clone— they were so similar. They had the same raven-colored curls and the same slender, lean figure-- the same facial structure and the same distinctive jawline and high-set cheekbones— the same smattering of freckles in nearly the same places— the same small, straight nose and the same thin, arched eyebrows.

There were small genetic differences between the two, if one looked close enough— like that Richie's mouth was wider than Clone-Richie's and that he had more freckles, or that Clone-Richie's nose was more upturned than Richie's and his chin protruded less. But, besides that, the two were essentially *identical*.

Clone-Richie stood there on the stairs, wide-eyed. "*Holy freaking Jesus...*" he exhaled in shock. "Y-You"—he pointed a shaking, accusatory finger at Richie—"have my face!"

"No, *you* have *mine!*" Richie protested.

"What are you even talking about? Your fa—"

The teenage girl cut him off as she demanded desperately, speaking the words on almost everyone's mind, "What the *hell* is going on?"

The woman (his aunt?) rushed forward frantically. In order to ease the heaviness of the situation— to ease the back-breaking burden weighing down Richie's shoulders— she set her hand softly onto his forearm. It didn't work. Richie looked over at her, surprised with such show of affection (?). "I think I'll have to explain some things, won't I?" she concluded after several beats. She then looked at Richie and said soberly, "And I think *you* have some things to say, too."

The woman wordlessly led Richie into another room, which was what he assumed to be their living area as there was a *colored twenty-four-inch* television positioned precisely in the corner (Richie stared at the television for *much* longer than he should've, for he had never seen one so *gigantic* before). The man with the coke-bottle specs (Ted), the disheveled-looking teenage girl, and the boy who looked exactly like Richie followed the woman (Karen?) silently, each wearing their own expressions ranging from shocked to confused to... weary (in Ted's case).

The woman folded herself into a cream-colored, tufted armchair, crisscrossing her ankles modestly as she did so. She then motioned wordlessly for Richie to sit on the couch (which matched the armchair in the fact that it was tufted, otherwise clashing terribly as it was an *ugly-as-hell* shade of orange) and commanded Clone-Richie sit beside him, the teenage girl on his other side. Ted came in last, selecting an armchair that was off to the side in a rather secluded corner.

Richie set his duct-taped backpack on the floor beside his sneakers (which were still encrusted with dried mud, mind you). It fell onto the polished hardwood with an idle *clunk*. His father's thick, black corduroy jacket was still wrapped protectively around his shoulders, unbuttoned, but he chose not to take it off, for it provided him some warmth in this difficult situation.

The woman started, her tone smooth and delicate, "Richie, honey, will you please tell me what happened? What sent you here? What you know?"

Richie swallowed thickly, mentally preparing himself to delve into basically an abridged version of his sob-story. He hadn't hesitated too much in explaining, for it was really only the basic truth of how each of his parents died. "Well... around two years ago, my father died suddenly from a heart attack. At the end of last summer, my mother caught severe tuberculosis and was hospitalized. She died a week ago, but before she did, she told me to find you if something happened to her. Something did, obviously. She said something like you promised that you would take care of me. All I know is that your last name is Wheeler, that you live here in Hawkins, Indiana, and that I have a clone or something..." He motioned toward Clone-Richie with his thumb.

For some time, the woman mulled over what he had said. It seemed that she did so by looking intently at her clasped hands of which rested idly on her knees. At last, she addressed the children on the couch, gaze lingering for several seconds on each. Somberly, she said, "I have something to tell you... Mike and Nancy, too. And I *beg* of you to hear me out."

Richie nodded resolutely. Soon, so did Mike and Nancy.

"I... Richie..." she then abandoned all self-heed and decided that she would have to confess bluntly, "You're *my* son..."

It was now possible to choke on air, apparently. After Richie had composed himself, he demanded (at the same time as Mike, mind you), "What?" His and Mike's voices were so uncannily similar (but not the same), that it sounded almost as if either had spoken much louder than they really had, their voices had blended together so well. Mike and Richie shared a look that said, in short, '*Woah, that was weird...*'

"So, are we...?" Mike trailed off tentatively.

"Twins?" Richie finished the thought.

His mother (it was weird for him to refer to her as that, despite that it was apparently the truth) nodded earnestly in return.

Richie supposed that it made sense— him and Mike being identical

twins brothers, that is.

Despite that it all made sense for him, he still couldn't quiet the heavy thoughts in his head. He was confused as to why he had lived with his aunt (apparently, the person whom he had always thought to be his mother was actually his aunt) all of these years and not with his birth mother (who he had deemed to be his aunt not two minutes before). Just *thinking* started to hurt.

He was shocked, too (that was the predominant emotion), for he had never thought that his mother... no, his *aunt* ... would ever lie to him. He had always been so close with her, so this newfound revelation was thoroughly dumbfounding.

He was angry at his aunt since she had left him in the dark all of these years about his *real family*. Richie had not expected this when he came to Hawkins, that was for sure. He had merely expected to have this weird aunt (he had come to Hawkins with the resolute thought that his birth mother was his aunt) that, in his imagination, worked as a hairstylist (that only did ridiculous styles from the '70s), her husband, who was a stockbroker or something equally *boring* (he had gotten that pretty head-on, actually), and either four or three devil children. He had *not* expected to find out that he had an identical twin brother, and that the person of whom he *always* thought to be his mother... wasn't. This was absurd!

"But... how?" Nancy demanded, somewhat vexed but mostly confused. "How did you have Richie without us knowing? Without *me* knowing?! I was, what, *four* when he and Mike were born?"

"When I found out that I was pregnant with twins, my younger sister, Maggie, found out that her and her husband couldn't have children. I hid the fact that I was expecting twins from you, Nancy, and the weight of that will *always* be on my conscience because—"

"What about the weight of separating two *twins* at birth?! That's like a crime against humanity!" Mike shouted in rebuttal, eyes flashing. Richie looked over at him, and realized that Mike had his fists clenched at his sides, fingernails digging into the palms of his hands — almost hard enough to draw blood.

The words hung freely in the air like a foul stench, and no one dared to speak for the next few moments. Then, Ted (who Richie had assumed to be his birth father, but was still unsure) scolded Mike from across the room, having entered reality only when he had heard Mike raise his voice. “Michael, do *not* speak to your mother like that!”

Mike was, in fact, so furious, that he started to shake. His face had darkened several shades. His freckles looked like burnt holes in his complexion. Before he could shout something highly conflicting in response— probably followed with an exceptional string of colorful curse words that he had learned from Dustin— his mother cut him off. She had turned to her husband and actually *chastised* him, much to his surprise. “Ted, let the boy react however he pleases. He *and* Richie have the complete right to be angry with us.”

Mike didn’t believe this phoney-baloney act for one second! She only wanted forgiveness for what she had done, and what she had done had been absolutely, positively *unforgivable*! He wouldn’t give her what she wanted— not after *this*.

After several moments of silence, Nancy asked slowly and deliberately, “Why did you hide the fact that you were having twins? If it was because I wouldn’t have understood at four-years-old that you were giving away your child, I *understand*, but why did you hide it after that?”

“My sister and her husband, Wentworth, were planning to move to Maine once I had given them Richie because Wentworth had gotten hired there.” Mrs. Wheeler explained quickly. “I knew that both of them hated Hawkins and I had doubted that, with so much distance between us, with Ted’s work *here* and with Went’s work *there*, that we would see each other often. My sister and I thought that it would be better if both of you didn’t know that the other existed. Before she left, we planned that, if one of us were to die, then the remaining one would have custody of the child. The last time I talked to my sister was through the phone last Christmas. She would always tell me how you were doing, Richie, about your friends and what you liked to do. But leaving you in the dark: that was *terrible*. We should have told you before.”

At this, Mike became even *more* angrier, if that was even possible. He suddenly shot off the couch as fast as an airborne bullet, his hair bouncing as he did so. His fists shook madly at his sides. He was the physical embodiment of *pissed-off*.

Richie, too, was *beyond* mad, but masked it well enough. What his mother had said had made him feel unwanted— terribly so, but he pushed that feeling down along with the others.

Richie had half-expected Mike to punch something (or someone... his mother preferably), so he hurriedly rose beside him. He forcefully, but not painfully, grabbed onto his brother's arm (his right arm as he had suspected him to be right-handed, for that was typical) before anything rash could be done.

At this, Mike looked over at Richie, and it was made obvious that, with this show of anchoring, his previous fury had lessened considerably. Richie, one hand still coiled around Mike's arm, reached down and took his backpack off of the floor, haphazardly slinging it over his shoulder. Then, without another word, he pulled Mike into the entrance room.

He could hear his father call after them, half-heartedly beckoning them back into that wretched room, but to, of course, no avail. He could hear the distant sounds of his mother sobbing, though, and it was enough for him to look over his shoulder and observe the scene that he had nearly left. His mother had her head in her hands, her elbows on her knees, her shoulders shaking uncontrollably. Nancy was looking directly at him, her expression blank and emotionless. Richie almost approached them— almost came crawling back to the mother who didn't even want him— but Mike, noticing his internal conflict, took the lead and pulled him away.

Mike hauled Richie around the house with practiced elegance, his brain set into autopilot. He led Richie into his bedroom on the second floor (it was made obvious to Richie that the bedroom was Mike's because, there, tacked into the wall, was an enormous Star Wars movie poster), slamming the door shut behind him once he had all but shoved Richie, who had been rather preoccupied taking it all in, inside. The force of this, despite it being unintentional, had caused Richie to stumble, his arms pin-wheeling, and fall flat on his ass. He

landed on the floor with a resonant thud.

Due to some sort of strength of which he had uncovered as he was so furious, Mike had shoved Richie with an unintentionally considerable amount of force.

Richie blinked several times, dazed and confused as he lie there on the hardwood, nothing but a mound of haphazardly strewn (yet still intact) limbs. The inner corners of his specs had, for some reason, become foggy.

Mike recoiled in horror at what he had done. “SHIT! I’m so so so sorry, Richie!” he apologized desperately, appearing rather short of breath. He held out his hand with a contrite look, his brows cinched. Richie took it and let himself be clumsily pulled back onto his feet. “Are you alright?”

Without even thinking beforehand, on an impulse, Richie declared in one of his ridiculous Voices, “Why, I’m right as rain, Mikey-boy!” This, however, was against the whole purpose, for Mike looked even more worried than before, probably afraid that he had caused Richie to hit his head and permanently damage his brain. Richie, though, could see that his Voice had affected Mike in some way, so he immediately reassured his brother in his real, genuine Richie-Tozier Voice, “*Really*, dude... I’m fine— *It’s* fine.”

Mike nodded, though hesitantly, in response.

And that was that. The conversation was over as if it had never happened.

Mike then huffed, exasperated, tiredly falling back onto the door and sliding down it, his body moving as gracelessly as an untrained marionette. Richie watched this show of dramatics with furrowed brows, unsure of what he should do. He wondered at what point would he be crossing the metaphorical line. After several long-drawn moments of simply standing there, thinking, he sat down on the floor beside his brother, bringing his knobby knees to his chest almost reassuringly in part of himself.

Having sensed this newfound body-heat beside him, Mike looked

over to address it. For several moments, he did nothing but stare. If it were anyone else, Richie would feel uncomfortable under this gaze, but it was his *identical twin* brother of which neither he, nor Mike, had even known *existed* until approximately half an hour ago, so Richie wouldn't blame him for staring. Eventually, Mike redirected his attention to a loose thread on his plaid pajama pants. He picked at the thread aimlessly as he murmured, almost sadly, "I'm sorry about m— *our* parents. It can be a *real* blessing in disguise that you didn't have to live with them all this time."

Richie realized that he could have taken this the wrong way, that perhaps his aunt and uncle (previously *mother* and *father*) dying was the absolute *best* thing that had ever happened to him, when it really wasn't. He also knew that Mike probably didn't mean it in that way, that his intentions were well. So, Richie remarked, "I guess, you're right. If shit hadn't hit the fan, I wouldn't be here, meeting you."

Richie knew that what he had said had been sappy as shit, and if Bill and/or Stan had somehow heard him say it, he would positively *die* from the embarrassment of them constantly repeat it mockingly (probably pitching their voices up several octaves for the effect), and, not to mention, it would get to his head, but he couldn't help it if the situation called for sappiness. In truth, he had actually come to like his brother in the half an hour that he had known him, and he thought that he was pretty badass and rebellious (or fueled with teenage angst, there was really no telling which), but he would rather brush his teeth and then chug an entire gallon of orange juice than admit it point-blank. Instead, he would dance around it.

Mike smiled gently in response. "I'm sorry about your, well, your adoptive parents, by the way. I'm sorry that you came all this way only to find out about *this*. It sucks."

Richie was overcome with the sudden urge to be *funny*— to turn Mike's words into something lewd and obscene. All in good fun, that is. He swallowed the gnawing urge like he would bad medicine, that liquid cherry-flavored (or, even worse, grape-flavored) shit that his (adoptive) mother made him take whenever he had a cold. Regaining his composure, he pointed out wisely, "You had to find out the same thing thanks to me showing up on your doorstep, completely uninvited. This might've been easier if I'd just called or something."

"Mom would've taken you in if she found out what happened any other way, I'm sure. You just made the first move." Mike was surprised with how greatly he spoke of his mother then, for, not ten minutes before, he had been overcome with that sudden teenage urge to punch her in the face. Just as he did before, he shook the thought away, somewhat affronted with it.

"Maybe, you're right..." Richie said after a moment. "This isn't so bad. Coming here didn't make my life any *worse*, I don't think."

Mike nodded once as if to show his satisfaction with how things had eventually fallen into place. "And I'm sure that you had to leave people back in... Maine, was it?"

"Yeah... Derry, Maine. It was a shithole of a town almost entirely full of shithole people, but it was my home nonetheless. I had friends, if that was what you're hinting at."

"This place is about the same," Mike revealed, sounding almost nonchalant through his passive words. "Full of adults who either care too much or not enough. There are bullies, but there are friends, too..." After a moment of which he had allowed to fall into silence, he continued, speaking earnestly, "I'm sorry, that you have to leave your friends to come here."

"My ma wanted me to— our aunt, I mean— and I would've done just about *anything* for her." Richie wondered momentarily if it sounded as if he were exaggerating in some way, because he *wasn't*, and he hoped that Mike understood that.

"She sounds better than *our* mom..." Mike observed. "Though, admittedly, both are at fault."

It took Richie several moments of wondering, of remembering, and even of doubting before he threw caution to the wind, trashed all of his thoughts of the past, and nodded in curt agreement. He had been close with his (adoptive) mother in his childhood, and back then, the mere thought of speaking ill of her was essentially... *unthinkable*. Taking all of those years where he practically idolized her— of her as his role model— and throwing it out of the window was difficult in itself, but he did it on an impulse and on that strange feeling deep in

his stomach.

He was here *now* with Mike in Hawkins, Indiana and his (adoptive) mother was from *then*. It was time that he start living his life in the now. He would not, for the life of him, hold grudges from the past. He knew that, if he wanted to do so, things would change drastically. He would eventually have to forgive Mrs. Wheeler for what she had done to both him and Mike. He knew that he would also have to find it in himself to forgive his (adoptive) mother for what she had done, too. It would be hypocritical of him to hold onto something like that, when his whole purpose was to start anew and *move on*.

Of course, there were things (people, specifically) of the past that he didn't want to *move on* from. His friends (sans Bev, who lived in Portland) were back home in Derry, living their lives to the fullest extent. Still, he was unsure of when (or *if*) he would see them again, but he still had hope that it would be soon, for then, the Losers would be matters of *now*.

So, Richie had nodded along. "Yeah, both kept that colossal secret from us— from basically *everyone*. And I know that it was really freaking fucked up, and I think this plan was basically *made* to cause familial destruction, but I think that it was, I don't know, *also* made to where it would be alright in the end. One sister died, the other was given custody. Or, at least, *hopefully* the other sister's existence was revealed." He was surprised when such serious words left his mouth, but chose to roll with it.

Behaving rather out-of-character even for himself, as if someone actually *confident* had, for some reason, chosen to possess his body, Mike countered all-too-bluntly, "That's optimistic bullshit, and you know it. No one knew when they were gonna die, it just *happened*. For all we know, Maggie could have thought that she would die when we were like fifty and the whole custody thing would never have even been relevant."

"I guess there could've been a note to explain everything somewhere in my house..." After a moment or two, Richie admitted, "I never really went through all of her stuff. 'Couldn't do it.'"

"What exactly did your adoptive mom tell you, anyway? How'd you

find out about us and where we lived?”

“I already told *our mother*” —the words sounded all-too-foreign on his lips, even more so than in his head—”about how my adoptive mom told me to come live with her sister and her family. She said that your last name was Wheeler, and that was about it. After she... well... you know... I had to talk to Social Services because I was ‘the last remaining member of the Tozier household’ and that woman told me about you guys— kinda confirmed that you actually existed. Well, as the woman talked to me she had another phone pressed against her shoulder and she talked really quickly like she wanted the conversation over with. She handed me her contact card and another sheet of paper with your address, surname, and phone number on it. Then, she basically told me to get lost.”

“You have her card... you should report her! I mean, she probably knew that we were twins if she had that information about Mom. She should’ve told you! I mean, if I was in your situation I would’ve—” Mike rambled, and it was made obvious to Richie that this was some sort of default reaction. Mike rambled almost as much as *he* did.

“I don’t think revealing *this* sort of thing was part of her contract.”

Mike shot him a look of furrowed brows. “*Of course*, it’s part of her contract! That’s basically her *job*! She works for the Social Services! The *Social Services*!” Mike’s words and the passion behind them hung dangerously low over their heads like an ominous, looming cloud. It seemed that, in his situation and ever since Richie had met him, that Mike stuck to his temper more than he did anything else. Richie was sure that there was another side to Mike— he had seen remorse and contriteness in his brother—but it seemed that his unkempt temper shone through more often than not.

“Just let it go, Mike... “ Richie breathed out, his voice thick and hoarse with tiredness. The uncomfortable, arcade-floor-patterned seats (Richie had a t-shirt somewhere with a similar pattern) on the Greyhound had allowed him little-to-no sleep, and he was in desperate need for at least *some* shut-eye. For the entire 29 hours that he had been crammed onto that bus, he was asleep for only three.

He had been stuck beside an old, dark-skinned man (who was

actually rather nice, Richie had gathered from the few words the two had exchanged) with four golden crowns on his teeth and an ancient-looking Walkman with terrible headphones that barely worked. The old man had listened to music for most of the ride— music that leaked from his shitty headphones as clearly as if it were being played aloud on an old, scratchy record. The man had three cassettes: one for strong jazz (the horns were exceptionally loud, and Richie could hear them brashy through the speakers), one for hip-hop (he had several of MC Hammer's songs on there), and one for Michael Jackson. It wasn't music that Richie usually liked (he liked The Clash and would *die* for The Smiths), but, the more he listened to it, the more he started to *actually* like it. Richie *really* liked it when the old man would put in the Michael Jackson cassette, for he knew some of the songs and remembered watching a few of their the music videos on MTV.

Mike hesitated for only a moment, then offered as if it meant nothing, "You can sleep on the top-bunk tonight..." He motioned off-handedly toward his bed, which had been pushed against the far wall. It was made of thick wood and was a ridiculously chunky piece of furniture in itself... but, hey, at least it looked to be studier *and* more comfortable than what Richie had back at home. The blue, striped sheets on the bottom bunk were disturbed and tangled, crumpled in a heap toward the foot of the bed, and Richie realized for the first time that his sudden, uninvited arrival had woken his brother. He felt a wave of shame wash over him as if it were fresh, cool water. It ran from head to foot. "It's already made up for when my friends stay over."

Richie felt awkward and out-of-place, but thanked Mike nonetheless. Mike nodded wordlessly in response, then told him that the bathroom was across the hall if he wanted to change his clothes, indirectly telling him that he needed to do so. Richie supposed that he would've asked where the bathroom was if Mike hadn't told him already.

He looked down at himself for the first time in a while, it seemed, and was suddenly struck with the thought that this body was most definitely not his. He realized how *stringy* he looked in this light (was it the light, or was it just who he was?)— how skinny and how meager he must have appeared. His clothes, unsurprisingly, were

wrinkled as he had been wearing the same ones for almost 30 freaking hours, and the state of them came, of course, from the pure, unsullied restless energy that seemed perpetually bottled up inside of Richie Tozier, who was the textbook definition of ‘hyperactive.’ Sitting still had always been a problem for him, it seemed, so being stuck on that damned bus had been absolute torture, but, of course, he figured that he would do it again if he *had* to.

When he saw Mike move to his feet, he did the same, his sneakers squeaking softly against the hardwood. Mike padded, sock-clad, across the room and started fiddling with something on his dresser. Once Richie had his backpack slung precariously over one shoulder, he ambled across the hall and into the dim, artificial light of the bathroom.

His first thought as the door clicked shut behind him was that these walls most *certainly* have eyes— that the centers of lilac and blue flowers printed on the wallpaper were sunken, burning irises. The feeling was so intense that Richie almost wanted to turn around, to tell Mike had he didn’t mind wearing what he had on now, but he could only *imagine* the embarrassment and questioning looks he would receive in return. So, he took out his clothes, pulled back the shower curtains, and quickly changed— putting on a cotton, black t-shirt and second-hand orange and blue sweatpants within the privacy of the tiled cube.

He didn’t waste time in the bathroom— didn’t even bother looking at himself in the mirror— slipping back into Mike’s bedroom almost unnoticed. Mike set down the walkie-talkie that he had been messing with swiftly when he saw Richie come in, wordlessly (and tiredly) crawling back onto the bottom-bunk. Richie set his backpack down on the floor beside the short, wooden ladder and climbed onto the top-bunk, cringing slightly as the bed groaned under his weight. He slid under the covers and made himself comfortable. Flopping onto the pillow, he realized that he still had his specs on, for they were digging into his face painfully, surely leaving marks on his nose. He cursed almost inaudibly and took them off.

“Mike...” Richie whispered. He had shifted to where he could lean over the side of the bed, upside-down, his black curls a curtain. He looked down at Mike, who was cocooned in blankets, already on the

culsp of a dream.

His eyelids flickered at the sound of his name. "What?" came his response.

Richie held his specs out in one hand, extended over the side of the bed. "Can you put these somewhere?"

Instead of answering with words, Mike nodded in response. He grabbed the dangling specs from Richie, folded them, and set them on the bedside table beside his alarm clock. Glasses-less, Richie retreated back onto his bunk, pulled the covers up to his chin, closed his eyes, and tried his best to fall asleep in this new, foreign setting.

Notes for the Chapter:

GAHH! sooo you might be thinking 'another one?'... well, yeah, another one. i loveeee this concept so freaking much that i couldn't help myself from writing more on it. of course, slow it down was probably my biggest fanfiction success like ever, but i'm totally flopping with writing it. i hope with every single morsel in my body that i'll continue this one. trust me, guys, i'll try. i never leave a fanficiton without trying my hardest.

anyway, thanks for reading this shit :)

2. seeing double

Notes for the Chapter:

i am so so so sorry that I had this set to 1/1 chapters!
i feel so stupid! WOW! anyway, this story will be
multi-chaptered (hint: this). i'm actually super-duper
proud of this chapter, so i hope you guys like it!!

[check out the bitchin playlist for this story!](#)

It was around 10 o'clock the next morning. The leaves that had been discarded from bare trees were lifeless and sepia-toned. The muted sunshine that hit their faces had been filtered through thick, dense cumulonimbus clouds— a tell-tale sign that rain was soon approaching. Mike Wheeler pedaled through the streets of Hawkins almost leisurely, his dark curls waving in the breeze. Behind him, Richie Tozier coasted (the Bicycle cards clothes-pinned onto the wheels burring along as they spun), putting off pedaling as much as possible. He had been stuck riding a bike too small for him, his knees hitting the handlebars each time he pumped his legs. Mike had offered him his own bike, which he assumed was at least somewhat close to the right size, but Richie had selflessly refused. He regretted that now.

To Mike, this was one of the coldest days Hawkins had seen all autumn, but to Richie, this was *nothing*. If living in Maine had taught him *one* thing, it was how to endure to the cold. The bitter air burned their heaving lungs, but both took it in hungrily, gliding down what Mike and his friends called Mirkwood.

Eventually, after Richie had bumped his knees on the handlebars at least a hundred more times, the two watched as the Palace Arcade came into view. Mike led Richie to the bike rack beside the building, where he hopped off his bicycle (the wheels were still spinning) and took the bike lock out of his front basket. Richie had to maneuver himself off of the bike, and he did so with an incredibly pissed-off look on his freckled face. Scowling, he said to Mike, "I'm riding *your*

bike back, all right? I can't stand to do that again on that little thing. Doesn't Nancy have a bicycle or something?"

"Yeah, at one point she did." Mike recalled the thing, decked out with sparkling pink and purple streamers. "She got older and never rode it. Her boyfriend, Steve, drives her everywhere, anyway. I think Mom sold it at the neighborhood garage sale or something. I'm surprised she didn't save it for Holly."

"Holly?" Richie kicked down the kickstand once he had set the bike in between the metal bars of the rack. He leaned against it, half-attentively crossing his arms, his brows knit in confusion.

For several seconds, Mike said nothing. Then, belatedly, he pulled a face of recognition. "Our four-year-old sister. I guess since she didn't come downstairs last night no one really mentioned her."

"Wait... I have *another* sister?!" Richie stared at Mike, mouth unhinged. His brows vanished underneath his crown of dark curls.

Mike opened his mouth to confirm this, but slammed it closed when he noticed Dustin and Lucas on their bikes, headed toward the arcade, their mouths moving about a mile a minute, apparently in the middle of an expressive conversation. Richie turned to watch them approach, realizing, from Mike's expression, that these *nerds* were Mike's friends that he was supposed to be meeting. He wondered if these kids knew who he was— if Mike had told them who Richie really was to him.

His internal question was answered, however, when Dustin looked straight at him, his expression morphing into one of complete shock. Suddenly, Dustin swerved his bike to the side, almost hitting Lucas as he did so. Lucas cursed, veering away from Dustin's out-of-control bike as to not be hit. Lucas then looked back toward the arcade and noticed Richie standing there beside Mike. Both coasted toward Richie and Mike, brows furrowed.

Dustin dug his sneakers to the asphalt, creating an awful scraping sound, but successfully stopping in front of the two look-alikes. "Mike... What the *hell* is going on?" Dustin demanded as Lucas pulled in beside him.

Richie took the metaphorical reins, but it didn't necessarily mean he knew how to steer with them. "I'm Richie Tozier..." He introduced himself and extended his hand, but both Dustin and Lucas were far too shocked to consciously respond to it. He let his hand fall back to his side when no one shook it, but that didn't lessen his stride. Southern Belle Voice and all, he continued, "I'm good ol' Mikey-boy's long-lost *identical* twin brother came all the way from Maine. Well, I guess, that I came from my momma's vagina, but, then again, so did Mike."

"You fucking dick!" Mike flicked Richie on the forehead, hard, thankfully shutting him up before he made a fool of himself. *Too late*. Dustin looked intrigued with Richie's outlandish introduction, his brows raised, mouth pursed to the side. Lucas, however, looked confused. He had never in his whole life imagined such words coming out of *Mike Wheeler's* mouth. Well, they didn't *really*, but they *had* come from the mouth of someone who looked almost exactly like him. He thought that this whole thing was... *surreal*, at the very least.

Lucas turned to Mike (or, the one *without* the ridiculous-looking specs), and demanded, "How come you never told us you had an *identical twin brother*?" After a moment of collecting his thoughts, he continued passionately, "Are you adopted, Mike? God, if you *were* that would be some *insane* soap-opera shit!"

"I'm *not* adopted, Lucas. And this already *is* some insane soap-opera shit. Richie was—" Mike started, but was *once again* cut off— this time with the familiar sound of an engine. It was, without a doubt, Jonathan Byers' 1972 Ford LTD.

Jonathan had carefully pulled into the parking space beside the bike rack and the collaboration of boys. Will sat beside him in the passenger seat, looking out of the window and at the scene before him with much interest. For several moments, Jonathan was confused as to what had caused the bizarre look on Will's face, but then he followed his younger brother's gaze and noticed Mike standing there beside... *another Mike*? He cranked down his window and pointed at the look-alike. "What's going on?" he demanded.

"This is Richie..." Mike explained hurriedly, not wanting to risk the chance of Richie taking control once more. He tried to shorten his

explanation as much as he could, “We found out that we’re long-lost twin brothers. Mom had both of us and we were separated when we were born. Richie came and found us.”

For several moments, Jonathan did nothing but stare. Then, obviously unsure of how to respond, he nodded his head. As if satisfied with this explanation, he turned to Will and said, “I’ll be here at 3 o’clock on the dot. Call Mom if anything happens and don’t be late. We have to be home at 3:15 or Mom will freak out and call the police again.”

Richie was so interested as to why their mom had called the police that he almost asked them, but before even *he* (as quick as he talks) could get the words out, Will nodded and said resolutely, “I will, don’t worry...”

Will smiled at his brother, thin-lipped despite it all, and slipped out of the car. Jonathan waved to his brother, then, after a moment, to Mike and pulled out of the parking lot. After his brother’s car vanished around the corner, Will turned to his friends and demanded somberly, “Does this have anything to do with... you know?” *The Upside-Down*, he hinted wordlessly.

Mike understood, bless him. “I don’t know...” He admitted truthfully, and his voice too was twinged in earnestness. Richie stared confusedly at both of them, not quite understanding. “Why would it? Did you have another episode?” The latter question was asked, of course, worriedly.

“No, I *didn’t*. It’s just...” Will sighed, sounding almost defeated. He struggled to articulate what he actually meant. “I dunno, I guess that since all these weird things happened to us, I assume things are what they aren’t.”

Mike nodded once as if to show that he understood. Richie had so *many* questions, but decided to keep them to himself, making a mental note to pry the answers out of Mike later, but something told him that Mike might not tell him that much.

Suddenly overcome with the need to make himself known, Richie introduced himself once more— this time to the short, almost *ill-*

looking kid with a chestnut-brown bowl cut. For some strange reason that Richie couldn't quite place, he was reminded *strongly* of Eddie Kaspbrak. "Richie Tozier is the name and Voices are the game!" he nearly screamed, smiling broadly. Instead of waiting for *Will* to shake *his* hand, he reached over and took Will's hand into both of his own, shaking it enthusiastically. "It's a *real* pleasure to make your acquaintance! A real pleasure! Ah say! Ah say! You sure do know how to s—"

Mike rolled his eyes in response to this ridiculous... *interaction*, turning to his brother and stomping on his foot. Richie yelped, sounding uncannily like a dog whose tail had accidentally been stepped on. However, after a moment or two, just as a loyal dog would, the smile was back on his face.

Will smiled back politely, somewhat amused with this show of personality. "Will Byers," he said resolutely, letting his hand fall.

"This—" Mike pointed to the kid with curly, brown hair poking out of a red, white, and blue hat— "is Dustin Henderson..." Dustin smiled crookedly at Richie, showcasing his new, plastic teeth. "And this—" Mike pointed toward the dark-skinned kid— "is Lucas Sinclair." Lucas nodded toward Richie once in greeting.

As Richie, his brother, and his brother's friends started toward the arcade, he asked curiously, "Any of you guys good at *Karate Champ*? I have the highest score in the arcade back home. I doubt someone beat the score, so I probably still have it. I'm a master, I'm telling you."

Dustin shouldered the door, unconsciously holding it for the others, "Trust me, *Dig Dug* and *Dragon's Lair* are what we're good at. I have the high-score on both."

"I have second on *Dig Dug*, shit-for-brains, and I would've gotten first if Mike hadn't distracted me!" Lucas attested bitterly.

"Hey! Don't blame the fact that you're terrible at *Dig Dug* on me!" Mike countered fiercely, looking insulted. The door slammed shut behind him.

“You’re worse than I am, Mr. Fifteenth Place!”

As Mike and Lucas bickered over *Dig Dug*, Richie looked around the fluorescently-lit arcade, a wave of multi-colored lights flooding his scenes. The floors were, of course, that generic arcade-floor pattern—the black background with the weird multi-colored streamers and bits of confetti. He stood inside of an intricate labyrinth of arcade games — each one different than the other. He realized easily and with undeniable clarity that this arcade was *much* better than the one back home.

As the two dimwits bantered like a bunch of buffoons, Will turned to Richie and said, “You know, there’s this kid in our grade, Troy, and he has the high-score on *Karate Champ*. He used to make fun of us, so if you beat his score, it’d be great revenge.”

A devilish smirk formed on his face. “I like the way you think, bud! The kid won’t know what hit him.”

Just as Richie was about to ask if Will knew where the *Karate Champ* machine was, Dustin’s voice cut into the air like a hot knife, “Guys! Look over there!” Lucas and Mike fell silent and followed where Dustin was pointing. Suddenly, there were four sets of eyes on the *Dig Dug* machine... or, rather, *who* was playing the *Dig Dug* machine. “There are rarely *ever* girls in here! Much less girls actually playing *Dig Dug*.”

There was a red-headed girl leant over the *Dig Dug* machine, fingers dancing over the buttons and controls almost effortlessly— almost as if they belonged there, pressed against the machine. A curtain of fiery hair shielded half of her face, but it didn’t look like she cared that her vision was obscured. Even from so far away, her undeniable beauty was as clear as day. Lucas and Dustin were *sure* that they’d never seen someone so pretty inside of the arcade, of all places. The thought hadn’t crossed the other’s mind’s. All *Richie* could think was how much this girl reminded him of Beverly Marsh.

“That girl is so cool...” Lucas declared breathlessly.

Dustin nodded, but his next words contradicted the action. “If she really is ‘sooo cooooool’ then you should go over there and talk to her.

Unless...” In mock consideration, he held his index finger to his chin. “You’re too chicken to do it.”

“I’m not ‘too chicken’” Lucas mimicked Dustin, raising his voice several octaves for the effect. “If anything, *you’re* too chicken. Why don’t *you* go talk to her?”

“Because I didn’t say that she was ‘sooo coooool’ while practically drooling!”

“God, Dustin! You’re so *freaking*— ”

Richie had had enough of this chicken shit. To Dustin and Lucas, he mumbled, “Pussies...” as he strolled across the arcade suavely in the direction of the red-headed chick. It made both of them shut their mouths instantly, merely watching as Richie neared the girl.

“*Dig Dug*, huh?” Richie stood beside her, his arms crossed over his chest. The fluorescent lights of the games around him reflected off of his coke-bottle specs.

She looked over at him quickly before returning her attention back to the machine before her. “What do *you* want, beanpole?”

“Well...” Richie wondered if he should lie, but decided that telling the truth would save him the embarrassment. “You see, my brother and his friends thought it was insane that there was a girl here in the arcade. I’m not from here, so I’m used to it. Two of them started bickering about who would be the one to talk to you. Their bickering was getting annoying, and I wanted it over with, so... here I am.”

Her character died in the game. It looked like she had only *just* started and wouldn’t have minded losing. At last, she turned to face him. “You said that you aren’t from here. Where are you from then? I haven’t lived here for long, but I haven’t met anyone that’s new to town yet.”

“I’m from Maine. I would advise, though, not asking *how* I ended up here in Shithole Hawkins. That story is too long and too complicated.” After several moments, he continued, “What about you? Where were you from?”

“California.”

“Jeezum-Crow!” Richie exclaimed excitedly. Dreamily, an almost dazed look having taken over his face, he went on, his words fast and passionate, “Living in California is my *dream*! Well... LA, specifically. I’ve wanted to be a comedian since I was little and I heard that most comedians come from there. Either there or New York City. I would *love* to live in either.”

“Thanks for the life story, Four-Eyes” She raised her brows, smirking. It was then that Richie realized that he could agree with Lucas on this one: she was *sooo coooool*. “I’m Max Mayfield.”

“Richie... Richie Tozier.”

“Sick, Richie... Richie Tozier— the aspiring comedian, four-eyed freak, and renown beanpole.”

“I’m not the *only* beanpole here, you know....” He jabbed his thumb over his shoulder, pointing toward where his brother and his brother’s friends stood, watching this exchange not-so-discreetly. “I have an identical twin brother, who I didn’t know existed until... approximately 12 hours ago. Oh! *And* his buffoon friends. Except for Will. He isn’t so stupid.”

“Shit!” Max exclaimed breathlessly, big blue eyes following where he was pointing. She watched as Mike and his friends did their best to act nonchalant— as if they *hadn’t* been watching this whole thing unfold. It didn’t work very well, if Dustin hitting his head on the *Tetris* machine was any indication. “You’re living in a *soap-opera*.”

Richie shrugged, “I’ve heard *that* enough times, Red.”

“Egh! Don’t call me *that*!”

Don't call me that!

“Too late, Red...” Richie, shit-eating grin and all, was stubborn to no end. When he made a nickname for someone, there wasn’t a chance in hell that he would stop using it. Eddie would know— he had about a *million* nicknames thanks to Richie. “The name’s already stuck.”

Meanwhile, Mike, seeing the shocked/embarrassed looks on Dustin and Lucas' faces, responded by rolling his eyes, showing just how much he cared about this girl his friends were suddenly obsessed with. In an attempt to distance himself, he grabbed Will's arm and pulled him away.

As Mike pulled him around to the other side of the arcade where the less-used machines were, Will asked, his voice as soft as his question was genuine, "What's wrong?"

Mike said nothing. A scowl had made its way onto his freckled face, and it meant to stay there. Instead of answering, he extracted a lone quarter out of the pocket of his corduroy slacks and shoved it into the nearest machine. He slammed the PLAY button down with much more force than what was necessary, obviously pissed over something as he pressed down buttons and moved the joystick harshly. Will too said nothing as he watched Mike, surprised and also somewhat confused when Mike got the second highest score on his first attempt. Then, he pulled another quarter out of his pocket and played through the game again— this time getting the high-score. As he usually did, he entered his name as HOTWHEELS.

Back on the other side of the arcade, Richie had noticed both Mike and Will's vanishing act. He said nothing to indicate that Max should follow him as he walked over to Dustin and Lucas, she simply *did*. When he and Max came to an eventual stop in front of Dustin and Lucas, Richie introduced them half-assedly, practically forcing Max to interact with his brother's friends, "Here, Max. Meet Dustin and Lucas." Then, before *anyone* could process what had happened, Richie had stalked off in search of Will and Mike.

Richie had been searching for quite some time before he finally managed to find Will standing beside the *Battlezone* machine, his arms crossed, a worried look on his face. His gaze was flickering between the game on the machine and something behind it, presumably the person that was actually playing it. The actual player, however, was out of Richie's view, but he could assume resolutely that it was his brother, Mike.

As he neared, Will looked over at him. That worried look was still on his face, and Richie couldn't help but think that it had to do with

Mike, so he quickened his stride ever-so-slightly. Richie was right in the fact that Mike had been the one behind the machine, and when he stood beside Will, several feet away from Mike, he was not addressed.

Richie looked down at Will and mumbled, “What crawled into *his* ass and died?”

“He won’t tell me...” Will admitted, also monitoring his tone-of-voice. “But I *think* it has something to do with that girl.”

“What, does he *like* her or something? I mean, I can see the appeal, but... *why*?”

Will lost the color in his face and turned into an awkward, fumbling mess all in several short seconds. He choked out, “Uh... *no*. I don’t think that he does.”

Richie could tell that Will was hiding something, and wondered if he should accost Will for what it was. He decided that *asking* and trying to find out himself wouldn’t hurt. “Does he already have a girlfriend or something?”

“I guess, you could say that...” Will looked at Richie, an earnest look flashing across his expression. “It’s just... It’s *really* complicated.”

“Complicated? How so?”

“I can hear *both* of you, yanno?” Mike grumbled suddenly, focused gaze still glued to the machine. “Shut it before I...” A riff of failure sounded from the machine, indicating that his character had been killed. “Die...” he trailed off. He stuffed his hands into his pockets and turned to address Richie. “I don’t *like* that girl. You, Dustin, and Lucas do.”

“Bullshit, Mike. Max reminds *me* of one my friends from home. I don’t know about Dustin and Lucas, though. I mean, I don’t know them too well, but Max is actually nice, believe it or not. Well... I’ve said about 50 words to her, but I can tell.”

“You might’ve said 50 words, Richie, but she probably said, I don’t know, like 10...” Will deduced smartly, voice light. Richie burst out

laughing at this, and the sound was, in fact, so contagious that it had Will and even *Mike* laughing a little bit, too.

Notes for the Chapter:

this is partially unedited because i'm lazy, but i'll go through and fix any errors in a little bit.

3. the bearer of bad news

Notes for the Chapter:

this is not all you'll see (and hear) of the losers, don't worry!

just wait and see ;)

[check out the bitchin playlist for this story!](#)

At around three o'clock that very afternoon (after Jonathan had taken Will home), Mike and Richie left the arcade, making their steadfast way back home. The twins coasted down the streets of Hawkins, traveling the same path as before, this time, however, with an all-too-familiar feeling of dread rather than the previous feeling of freedom — of adolescence. This time, words were seldom exchanged, each apprehensive of what was to come.

That morning, neither had the courage *or* desire to confront Mrs. Wheeler about what she had revealed the previous night. Mike had shaken Richie awake, looking remorseful, at nine o'clock and had told him that he was about to ride over to the arcade to meet his friends and that Richie could either come with him or deal with their mother. Richie had settled on the former without any persuasion and/or hesitation whatsoever, had changed his clothes at lightning speed, and had let Mike lead him out of the house, unnoticed to essentially everyone.

After all the shit that went down in Hawkins the year before, his mother had been exceptionally strict in matters regarding the whereabouts of her children, so when Mike had walked through the front door (the basement door had been jammed ever since Dustin slammed it and Mr. Wheeler hadn't quite gotten around to fix it) in the late hours of the afternoon, he had expected nothing less than to be harshly chided for leaving without telling his mother where he was going. Except... Well, that never happened.

The best explanation for her freaky, bizarre behavior was that her guilt had overpowered her usual motherly instinct. Mike figured that it would make perfect sense for her to feel guilty, so he didn't mention anything to Richie about his expectations not quite being matched. For all Richie knew, it could be perfectly normal for Mrs. Wheeler not to notice them bound down the basement stairs.

Mike had been in front for the purpose of leading, and once he had made it into the basement, he fluttered around the room, turning on lamps and flipping certain switches with a practiced hand. Warm, orange light filled the basement, dancing across their faces. There was one window, and that was the one of the basement door, but it provided minimal light.

"Wow..." Richie breathed out in shock, awestruck as he looked around the basement. In truth, it was a lot to take in.

The floor was cold, gray concrete, but there had been several rugs decorated with strange, colorful patterns strewn about the room to provide at least some warmth. Leant against the far wall stood a massive metal shelf loaded with paint cans, light-bulb boxes, batteries, and other random necessities. The walls were paneled with dark wood. There was a table across from the staircase, which descended into the middle of the room, and four mismatched chairs, several with broken legs, had been pulled under it.

Strangely, held upright with two wooden chairs, was a fort made of blankets, and it seemed to crave Richie's attention. Underneath the checkered blanket of which acted as a canopy, pillows had been put together like little mattresses and blankets had been merely left crumpled in a tangled, disheveled mess. There was another walkie-talkie here, just like the one in Mike's bedroom, and it sat discarded atop a space-themed blanket, looking lonesome and eerily foreign. If he were asked to describe this fort, only one word would come to his mind to explain how it looked— abandoned.

Richie felt somehow drawn toward this fort, and he started in its direction. "What's this?" he asked, merely curious as he motioned toward the thing.

All of a sudden, Mike was in between him and the fort, his arms

outstretched. With some force, Mike insisted stubbornly, "It's none of your business, nosy!" There was something in his eyes, Richie realized, and it certainly wasn't kindness. He soon realized that it was possessiveness.

"Jesus, dude. I was only curious..." Richie mumbled, sounding defeated as he averted his gaze. Just as the words left his mouth, the telephone upstairs started violently ringing. It rang continuously—monotonously—for several moments before it suddenly stopped, signaling that Mrs. Wheeler had answered it. Mike had sat down in one of the mismatched chairs, causally crossing his legs as if nothing had happened. His previous ferocity seemed to have diminished with the passing of the subject, but Richie did notice a slight change in his demeanor.

All of a sudden, Mrs. Wheeler called down to him from the kitchen, and he was reminded once more of what she had revealed the night before. "Richie! There's someone on the phone for you!"

"Coming!" Richie shouted back. He climbed the stairs obediently, and did not look back at Mike, for he knew that one look at his brother could potentially be able to persuade him to simply ignore the call.

He found the kitchen in no time, thankfully. The phone was hanging off of the receiver, waiting for him. Mrs. Wheeler was nowhere to be found. He took the phone into his hands and held it to his ear. "Hello?"

"Richie?" A voice broke through the uneven crackling. He couldn't tell who it was.

"Uh... Who is this?"

"This is Stan Uris. Geez, we haven't seen each other in three measly days and you've already forgotten me." The words came out as dryly as had been expected for Stan Uris, but there was something... off about the way that they had been used that caught Richie's interest.

He was instantly worried. His throat felt much too tight and he wondered distantly if this was what it felt like to be Eddie Kaspbrak. Voice hoarse, he demanded into the phone, shaking it harshly in his

desperation to be heard, “What’s happened? Did something happen?”

“Richie—” Stan tried.

Richie continued, deafened to this attempt for tranquility, “What’s wrong? What’s going on?”

“Richie—” He tried again.

“Did Eddie’s mo—”

“Richie!” Stan, who was quite obviously tired of this guessing game, screamed his friend’s name in order to put an end to his rambling. “Would you be quiet for *one second* so that I actually have time to answer your damn question?!”

Richie saw the reason in that (Stan always had reason), and bit down on his tongue. He settled with pacing around the kitchen to ease his anxiety rather than talking, the telephone pressed against his ear, the coiled wire surely getting tangled as he marched back and forth. He was overcome with the sudden urge to start laughing, for laughing had always been how he coped with uneasy situations, but he managed to control himself... meaning, his tongue was bleeding.

“I...” Stan started, but found himself unable to get the words out. He had meant to start off this call with telling Richie how much he and the others had been missed him, but it hadn’t turned out that way. And now, he found himself unable to backtrack— to give Richie the ‘good news’ first. He managed to come to his senses, however, but the words that came out of his mouth were entirely different than what he meant and were way more to-the-point than he had anticipated. “We think that It’s back.”

“What?” Richie hadn’t missed a beat in responding, but had stopped pacing across the floor. His words came out squeakier than usual, he realized, and supposed that it made perfect sense that they had. That demonic... *thing* really had fucked his life and turned him into the scared little kid that he had been the previous summer.

“Bev said that she saw It and that she’s 100% sure that it wasn’t her mind playing tricks on her.” Stan was surprised with how smoothly

and how willingly the words had left his mouth, but didn't complain. He simply went along with it.

"But... isn't she in Portland?"

"Yeah, she is," Stan nodded, though Richie could not see him. "I called you to tell you that we're pretty sure that It isn't limited to Derry. It... It can be other places, too."

"Like Hawkins...?"

"Yeah, like Hawkins."

Richie was silent for several moments, mulling over what had been revealed. He still couldn't fully comprehend all the things that were happening at one time. He had only *just* made it to Hawkins and met his brother and... He realized that Stan and the others didn't know about Mike. Perhaps, they expected him to come back to Derry, having only assumed that Richie had been forced through Social Services to live with his crazy aunt halfway across the country, not somewhere with actual, tangible meaning. "Are you saying that I have to come back? Because things happened here, Stanley, and it isn't as bad as I thought. I mean, I'd *love* to see you guys, and I really, really miss you—"

"I'm telling you to be careful. If you see anything out of the ordinary, call us, and we'll see what we can—"

"I have a twin brother..." Richie said suddenly. "Maggie and Went were my adoptive parents, technically my aunt and uncle. Here, I have a brother and two sisters and a mother and a father, all of which I had never known existed until last night. Why would It choose to come back just when I leave?"

It was silent on Stan's end for a while. Richie wondered if the line had been disconnected, but realized, if that were so, he would be able to hear the dial tone, and he heard nothing except for the crackling of the telephone. After a while, Stan's voice came through, but it sounded far away and scattered, "The others would want to know that."

“Yeah, I’m sure.” Richie smiled a small smile, feeling overpoweringly wistful and reminiscent all of a sudden. “You know, my twin brother’s name is Mike— just like Homeschool, which is slightly confusing and, now that I think about it, not confusing at all because they’re pretty similar, I guess. Meeting Mike, my brother, was quite the shock, seeing as we have the exact same face. I mean, I thought I had been cloned in my sleep or some cryptic shit—“

“Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait...” Stan interrupted Richie’s spiel. “You’re *identical* twins?”

“Yeah... I said that before, didn’t I?”

“No, you didn’t. Just said twins...” Stan said, and he sounded almost half-attentive, which was something he seldom was. His words came out as if he hadn’t put much thought into them before they had left his mouth. Perhaps he had others things on his mind, like the fact that there were “two Richies” on this planet, which was, in itself, a thoroughly terrifying thought.

“What about the other Losers? How’re they taking the... situation?” Or, in other words, how’re they taking the return of the demonic, other-worldly, child-eating, shape-shifting clown that could probably kill them this time if it really wanted to? It was an off-putting, morbid thought.

In all honestly, he hadn’t needed to ask this, he knew them well enough to know that they were taking it badly... that is, emotionally... but he asked it, anyway. Perhaps to hear something about the people of which he missed so terribly. It had only been three days (he had spent longer than that without seeing them when he was *at home*), but there was something final about turning away from them at that bus station that left him feeling lonely.

“I didn’t talk to Bev. She called Bill last night and Bill told us that she sounded, I dunno, *angry* about the whole thing. That’s pretty much expected for her, though, considering—“

“Wait, what happened with Bev? I guess, I forgot to ask. God, I wish she would’ve called me!”

"She told Bill that she saw It, disguised as Eddie, turn down an alley in the city. She followed it because she thought it was Eddie. It turned into the clown once It had her cornered. She managed to escape, and Bill said she sounded pretty pissed off about the fact that she said It in the first place."

It was a lot of information to take in, but, for some reason, Richie's mind caught on the fact that she saw *Eddie*, of all people. He wondered how that must feel— seeing one of the Losers' in a new town, thinking that maybe they wanted to surprise you with an unexpected visit, but then being totally, completely let down. It must've hurt, but Beverly was probably one of the strongest people he knew.

"Anyway... the others are pretty much all right. Mike and Ben have thrown themselves into more research, but have come up pretty much empty considering that It's supposed to only come out every twenty-seven years or so. Bill's stuttering has already gotten worse, and I think it's because all of this It stuff is bringing back memories of Georgie. We haven't seen Eddie much since. He called Bill earlier and told him that his mom had taken him to the emergency clinic that morning because she thought he was sick... Bill said that Ed was pissed off..."

Contrary to his jokes, Richie didn't exactly have the *best* relationship with Eddie's mom. In fact, that woman has hated his guts since he was five, and, ever since last summer, had forbidden him to enter her house. He was almost 100% certain that she had also forbidden Eddie to be friends with him, but Eddie obviously hadn't listened. Mrs. K's constant worrying had finally gotten to Eddie's head, and he was nearing his breaking point. One day, Richie knew, it would become too much for Eddie and he would finally explode, cursing and yelling at his mother, telling her to 'lay off' him, finally fighting back. He also knew that Mrs. K just wouldn't have that— Eddie would be in trouble— but it would all be worth it in the end.

"What about you, Bird Man? How're you holding up?"

The nickname, Stan realized, had been used merely to lessen the seriousness— the reality— of the situation. It had come back, and the others, in truth, weren't taking it well. He wondered, though, as

Richie had asked, how he was feeling about it all. Ever since Bill had told him about Bev seeing It, he hadn't spent much thinking about It's return and how it would affect himself. Most of his time had been used thinking about the others.

The scars from last summer were still there— pink and faded and scabbed over, but there nevertheless.

How *was* he holding up?

Should he deflect and say 'Fine'?

Richie would call him out on his bullshit, he realized, because Richie knew him better than anyone else did. He had been friends with Richie since the not-so-ripe age of three, and remained his longest, closest friend. Richie could read him better than anyone else, and was probably one of the only people he couldn't say 'Fine' to.

And so, before he knew it, the truth was spilling from his lips, "It's a lot to take in and I haven't had much time to process it, but it's terrifying, I guess. Having It back, I mean. What we thought we knew about It was wrong, or at least not entirely right. Not knowing what could happen, that's what's scary."

"You're right. If Bev's right, which she probably is since she wouldn't have called Bill if she wasn't sure about what she saw, and we've never heard of It coming back sooner than twenty-seven years, we're pretty much stuck." His voice became softer as he went on, "As much as I hate to say it, we have to wait and see what It'll do next. Have any children gone missing?"

Mike Wheeler was usually pretty good at leaving things be. He was, as much as he hated to admit it, an awfully lazy person by nature, so leaving things be was a typical thing for him, but he just couldn't help himself. His curiosity had gotten the better of him, and he found himself standing down the hall, peering around the corner, listening as Richie talked of... weird things to someone on the telephone. Besides, Mike could easily have been listening on the line, hearing both sides of the conversation, so he wasn't truly eavesdropping... right?

The words were somewhat jumbled from where he was standing, and he wondered for a few seconds if he had misheard what his brother was saying, but something told him he hadn't. Missing children? What the hell? He wondered what the conversation was about, if his brother had a terrifying secret.

"Not that I know of..." Stan responded somberly. "But, if It's truly back, It'll be, yanno, hungry..." It hurt Stan to admit this, but it was the truth, and he felt the need to express it. In that moment, he was the elephant in the room, but he was so only to avoid mistakes and misunderstandings in the future.

"Jesus, Stanley!" Richie cried, though he sounded neither accusing nor angry, simply... overwhelmed.

"What? It's true..." And both Stan and Richie fell silent. After several moments, Stan sighed, abandoning the topic, "Well, I just wanted to call you to, you know, warn you. We hope you'll be all right, but call us if anything out of the ordinary happens."

"Yeah, I will, don't worry. Talk to you soon, Stanford!"

"That's not my name, you—" Richie set the phone down on the receiver, cutting off Stan's retort. In an attempt to bring himself back to reality, he ran a tired hand down his face.

He couldn't believe that this was happening.

Notes for the Chapter:

first of all, i would like to apologize for taking almost a month to upload this chapter. life has been crazy, I'll tell you. i started school, which brought mixed feelings, and i had to deal with hurricane florence, which left me without WIFI and power for an entire week. because of the hurricane, i haven't been in school for three weeks. the made up days are gonna suck ass.

anyway, thx for reading this crap :)

4. the blood that is spilt

Notes for the Chapter:

you might be wondering 'is reading the flashback necessary?' my answer: yes, it is. it was fun to write and i noticed things that i hadn't realized before after having watched it like a zillion times so that i could analyze what happened. anyway, you do you.

[check out the bitchin playlist for this story!](#)

SEPTEMBER 1984

'The Clearing in the Barrens' had become someplace special— sacred, even— for Richie and his friends during the summer of which changed their lives. It was a safe haven of some sorts since most kids didn't want to be around the Kenduskeag, which, in truth, didn't smell the best on most days. The smell made sense considering the fact that it was connected to the sewers. It was only bad on days when it rained, for, when it rained, the sewer pipes overflowed and spilled into the Kenduskeag. Otherwise, it was tolerable.

It had been called the Barrens for as long as anyone could remember, but the name made no sense. The Barrens weren't barren at all.

The Barrens and the Kenduskeag, which went hand-in-hand, had gotten quite the reputation among the other kids around town for being 'disease-infested' ("If you touch the water, you'll get AIDS!") which, in all honestly, was probably 100% true, but the Losers didn't go around swimming in it. If swimming was on the agenda, they would venture to the Quarry instead, which was also a beloved Losers Club safe haven.

The clearing had been a location of significance for the group. It was only about .2 miles away from where the Apocalyptic Rock Fight of

which changed their summer had taken place, causing them to take Mike under their wing. After the fight, the Losers had taken Mike to this very clearing. It was also, however, where Bev had told them a few days before that she was leaving Derry once and for all, moving to Portland to live with her aunt.

Today, the Losers were sat in a circle, perched on smooth rocks. The sound of birds chirping off in the distance and the Kenduskeag's tumultuous waters filled their ears. The sun beat down on them like it was mid-summer rather than late— August, rather than September. It was unusual for a Maine summer to last this long, but no one was complaining. There were still two weeks before school started back again, anyway, and now they could savor the warm weather before they were forced back into stuffy, silent classrooms.

Bev had something important to tell them that she had been keeping to herself for quite some time, perhaps waiting for some sort of celestial sign to tell her that it was finally time to drop the bomb.

Here goes.

Once Richie, the last to arrive, had taken his seat between Eddie and Bill (not without whispering something brainless to Eddie, who rolled his eyes in response), she dove into her recollection, "Since, well, since I'm leaving tomorrow morning—"

"We'll miss you, Molly Ringwald..." Richie said suddenly. Bev looked over at Richie, who was grinning crookedly, silently revelling in the fact that he had used her most vehemently hated nickname. His eyes shifted around the circle.

"Yeah, Bev, we will..." Ben admitted.

"It's not guh-guh-gonna be the same wuh-wuh-wuh-without you..." Bill insisted.

The others murmured their agreement.

Bev looked down at her hands bashfully. She was thankful to have friends like these, and she knew that she would miss them terribly. "I'll miss you, too. All of you..." After several moments, however, she

added, smiling, "Except for you, Trashmouth."

"HEY!" Richie exclaimed, his arms held out in front of him in a mock-surrender. He then used a smart-sounding Voice, which was, in reality, a mixture of Richie reading from the Thesaurus in his head and the little that he knew from doing a Shakespeare play in Drama class, "Oh my, sweet darling, you have wounded me so! Your cutting words pierce through my very soul and have left me nothing but a shell of a man! I have been cast into the absolute depths of despair and only Eddie Spaghetti, my love, will be able to keep me in this very world! Eddieeeeeeeeeeeee—"

He obnoxiously stretched out Eddie's name for a solid ten seconds before said Loser reacted. Instead of reacting with words, per say, Eddie punched Richie in the arm as hard as he could, which, sure, had put an end to Richie's obnoxious lament, but had ultimately started up his amused laughter.

Eddie swatted at Richie again, and Richie, still laughing, swatted back at him. Eventually, their swatting match escalated into a full-on bitch fight, Richie laughing uncontrollably the entire time while Eddie scowled, obviously fighting a smile. The others watched, amused, laughing along with Richie, whose usual laugh had turned into something so funny-sounded, high-pitched, and breathy that they couldn't help but laugh along with them as Eddie did his best to keep a straight face.

After a solid two minutes of the Richie vs. Eddie bitch fight, Bill realized that he would have to break them up. This was a serious situation— Beverly was leaving. He grabbed the back of Richie's shirt and pulled him back. "Stuh-Stuh-Stop it, you two!" Richie wriggled and flailed for several moments before he realized that he had been taken away from Eddie, and managed to recompose himself. He sat back down beside Bill and smoothed down his shirt, his breathing labored. Eddie fixed his hair and took a seat.

The laughter had died out.

For several moments, it was silent— almost deafeningly so. It seemed that even the birds had stopped singing their sweet songs, the Kenduskeag frozen. Then, Bill broke the silence, "Whuh-Whuh-What

did you huh-huh-have to tell us, Bev?"

Bev cleared her throat. "Before I left I wanted to tell you guys what I saw back in the cistern. When I was..." She took a breath, then ventured on. "When I was *f-floating*. I saw things..." she trailed off. It seemed that she was debating on how she should put whatever she was going to say.

"Whuh-Whuh-What kind of things did you see?" Bill asked somberly, his brows knit.

"I can only remember parts, but I thought I was dead. That's what it felt like..." She was lent forward on her elbows of which rested on her knees. Richie thought that she looked as if she were deep in prayer, prayer for what, he didn't know. Her hands were clasped, her eyes squeezed shut.

"I saw all of us together back in the cistern..." she went on. "But we were older. I mean, our parents' ages."

Bev looked around at the others in order to gauge their reactions. Stan was looking down at his perpetually-clean sneakers, gaze unfocused. When she looked over at Ben, he was looking right back at her, his brows furrowed in thought. *It was us*, Ben tried to communicate with her telepathically, knowing it wouldn't work, but hoping that she understood him. *You saw us 27 years later. We came back for some reason.* Eddie was sucking on his bottom lip, looking out at the rushing Kenduskeag. Richie straightened his glasses quickly, watching her with great interest. Mike too was looking directly at her, and he appeared to be deep in thought, probably making the same connection that Ben had. Bill was staring at something directly over her shoulder with unfocused, inattentive eyes.

"Whuh-Whuh-Whuh-What were we all doing there?" he asked. His gaze briefly flickered over to Richie, remembering the fight—the split—in August. The topic of coming back to Derry had surfaced then, just as it had now. Richie, and most of the Losers, had been awfully convinced that they wouldn't come back to Derry when It came back. He wondered if Richie and the others felt differently about coming back after they confronted It in the sewers. His gut told

him that they had changed their minds.

“I just remember how we felt, how scared we were. I don’t think I could ever forget that...” Bev trailed off, looking down at a blade of grass poking out from underneath Eddie’s shoe.

For a moment, no one said a thing— not even Richie, who had been shocked into silence.

Bill’s downcast gaze suddenly caught on a shard of broken glass—presumably from a Coca-Cola bottle— on the ground beside his feet. He hadn’t realized it had been there until now. Suddenly struck with an idea, he took it into his hands and stood. “ Sw-Sw-Swear it,” he said with some force. “Sw-Sw-Swear... that if It isn’t dead, if It ever comes back, we’ll come back, too.” They would have to come back to defeat It once and for all.

And then, the others were standing— complying. Bev was the first to stand, then Eddie, Richie (Bill let out an audible sigh of relief), Ben, Mike, and Stan, in that order. No one looked thrilled with the idea of cutting their hands on a most likely disease-ridden shard of glass, but they understood the importance of this blood oath. This was a serious thing. Lives were at stake. No one had ever defeated It before.

Bill was the first to cut his palm with the glass, wincing at the sharp, immediate pain of it. The open wound bled. He took a breath, shook off the pain, and moved along. “Okay...” he whispered to himself for some sort of reassurance. Richie held his hand out in an offering, palms to Bill. He too winced as Bill brought the sharp end of the glass down his palm. “AGH!” he exclaimed, shaking his hand several times in an attempt to clean off some of its dripping blood.

Then, Bill moved over to Eddie, who also offered his hand. He turned away as Bill brought down the shard, not wanting to watch his own blood seep from the wound. Richie, who had somewhat composed himself, did his best to offer Eddie even the slightest bit of reassurance, setting his blood-free hand on his shoulder. Bill then moved along to Mike, and did the deed. As Bill brought the shard down his palm, Mike let out a sharp breath through his gritted teeth. Then, Bill shuffled over to Stan. He did so cautiously and slowly, perhaps because there were still bandages wrapped vertically around

his head and Bill was still worried for Stan's well-being. Stan had been the one most physically harmed (maybe even psychologically) during the final battle, and he was skeptical to harm him any further by cutting his palm. He wondered briefly why that hadn't been the case with Eddie. Eddie had broken his arm, for God's sake. *They're different*, his mind supplied. Stan offered his palm, and Bill cut it. He too winced. He held his hand to his chest, cradling it.

Bill blinked several times, then moved along to Ben, who offered his palm like the others. Bill brought down the shard, and Ben cringed. Finally, Bill moved over to Beverly, who offered him her hand as soon as he stood before her. As Bill brought the shard down her palm, their gazes met. She did not flinch like the others— her face twitched for a split second, then returned to normal.

Bill went back to his spot between Richie and Bev, wetting his lips. Remembering what was done in a blood oath, he took Bev's hand into his own, setting off a chain reaction with the others. Bev took Ben's hand. Ben took Stan's. Stan took Mike's. Mike took Eddie's. Eddie took Richie's. And Richie took Bill's.

A circle was formed. Blood was mixed. Losers were made. The promise was essentially inescapable.

OCTOBER 1984

Before Richie even realized it, he burst into hot tears. Involuntarily and uncontrollably, he sobbed. His shoulders shook violently and, in an attempt to muffle his cries, he held a hand over his mouth. His wobbling knees had given out from underneath him and he fell to the kitchen floor, knees slamming against the tile.

He couldn't for the life of him remember the last time that he had cried this hard. It would be expected that the last time he had cried to this extent was when his mother died, but that wasn't the case. He was absolutely, undoubtedly terrible at dealing with grief. It was one of his many, innumerable flaws.

During his mother's funeral, and unlike essentially everyone else there, he had not shed one tear. His cheeks and nose were flushed

red, but his eyes were devoid of tears. He had been perhaps the closest to Maggie Tozier in her final years, yet he was the only person in the church with dry eyes. Eddie, and Beverly (who had come back the *second* that she heard about his mother's passing) were holding onto his hands (Bev on his left, Eddie on his right) like their lives (and his) depended on the it, perhaps expecting Richie to be sobbing along with them. Except... he wasn't.

The church was about a hundred degrees even with the AC running on the coolest possible setting and the doors propped open. Several ladies from his mother's old work, all of which were ripe with age and *defiantly* older than his mother was, had pulled out delicate-looking hand fans like it was suddenly the 1960s again. Richie had on one of Stan's old tuxes, and to say that it was ill-fitting was an understatement. His shoes (which were also Stan's) pinched his feet to the point where he could barely walk. The collar of his tux was starched, and Richie found himself pulling on it uncomfortably until his restlessness eventually coaxed Bev and Eddie to grab his hands, both having assumed that his newfound energy was some sort of strange result of this funeral service. He was tempted to shake them off and loosen his tie, but knew that Mrs. Uris would on his ass the second that his hands fell back into his lap. He let himself be comforted throughout the service, whether that be through the words of the several woman that spoke at the pulpit or Bev and Eddie's tight, unrelenting grip.

Still, through it all, he didn't cry— not even in the semi-solitude of Stan's bedroom after he had fallen asleep.

Mrs. Uris had been kind enough to take him in for the week between his mother's death and his move to Indiana. He hadn't been left much time alone, for the Losers were insistent on restoring normalcy within the group. The week went by quicker than he would've liked, and, before he knew it, they were saying goodbye at the bus station, promising that they'd see each other again. Beverly was with them. She had somehow convinced her aunt to take the week off of school, but he supposed the 'death in the family' excuse could get you a long way. She would leave several hours after Richie, and there would be only five Losers left in Derry.

Saying goodbye was one of the hardest things Richie had ever had to

do. Still, through it all, he didn't cry.

But now, he had finally reached his breaking point. He couldn't hold the tears back any longer. All of his emotions had come rushing back to him at full speed, and there was no stopping them.

From down the hall, Mike watched with wide, shocked eyes. Richie's sobbing had left him unsure of how to react. He wondered if he should run over there and comfort him (he was terrible at comforting other people, and supposed that it wouldn't hurt to try), but that would make it obvious of the fact that he had been eavesdropping from down the hall. Several seconds passed where Mike did nothing, too shocked and conflicted to move.

Just as Mike made his mind, moving forward, Mrs. Wheeler intersected him, swooping in from out of no where. She knelt down beside Richie, pulling him into her arms. Mike blinked owlishly.

Richie, not composed in the slightest, lent into her embrace. From several steps down the hall, Mike could hear his mother whispering comforting things into Richie's ear, smoothing down his unruly hair with her hands. For some reason, watching this was unsettling for Mike. He understood that Richie needed someone to comfort him (though he didn't know why) and Mrs. Wheeler had been there to act as his shoulder to cry on, but, remembering everything from the night before, Mike felt sick at the sight of his mother trying desperately to earn forgiveness.

His feet moved before his brain could even register it. He had rushed into the kitchen, his mind concocting some sort of lie to prove that he hadn't been watching the whole time. He didn't know if it was necessary, but decided it'd be better to play it that way. "What happened?!" he demanded to no one in particular, voice wavering slightly (that not being part of the plan).

To his surprise, Mrs. Wheeler regarded him instantly, and, without speaking, she gestured for him to come closer. Mike blindly complied, brows furrowed. Once he was within arm's reach, she led him into Richie's embrace. Richie was still sobbing deliriously, and he didn't seem to notice as Mike set his hands on his back. It invoked a strange mixed feeling of awkwardness and, more predominantly,

concern. Richie seemed to be half-attentive at the most.

Mrs. Wheeler stood, smoothing out the creases in her slacks. She stared silently at the hugging boys for several moments, then walked off. Mike could distantly hear the clinking of pots and pans, but didn't lift his head to look. Richie had him in a vice-like hold, restricting him from doing most things (breathing, that is). Mike was very tempted to pull himself out of the embrace, but knew that it would be terribly wrong. He ignored his discomfort, choosing to focus instead on making sure his brother was all right.

He did his best. "You're all right, Rich..." he said softly. His voice came out hoarse and thick, so much so that it sounded almost as if he were the one crying instead. "You're here now, and it's all right..."

His best, apparently, wasn't all that great. His latter comment seemed to force Richie back into reality. He pulled himself out of the embrace. "It's *not* all right, Mike!" he snarled. His voice too was hoarse from overuse, but his retort came out equally bitter. "Shit is happening back home and I don't know what to do! It all happens *right* after I leave!"

"What happens?" No answer. "*What* happens, Richie?" he asked once more. This time, with some force (and a hint of desperation).

It took Richie several moments before he answered, his voice low and tone somber, "*It* happens..." Vague.

"It? What's It?"

"I..." Richie trailed off uncertainly. He didn't even know if he was *allowed* to tell Mike this. Would the other Losers disapprove? It's not like *they* told anyone else, right? Besides, he would probably sound batshit crazy. His mind reeled, but, after several moments, he made his decision.

Since It could come here, to Hawkins, he would warn his brother—tell him what It had done to Derry the previous summer. He pulled himself to his feet, the only remnants of his mental breakdown being the redness of his eyes and the stuffiness of his nose. Mike did the same, his mouth parted in confusion. "I'll tell you if we can find

someplace where we can't be overheard."

Mike nodded once. He wondered if whatever happened back in Richie's old town had anything to do with Hawkins Labs, for Richie was persistent on the fact that he would only tell Mike if they could find someplace where they couldn't be overheard. He wondered if this, too, had something to do with the government. He pushed such thoughts out as he led Richie back down the basement stairs.

However, only two short steps away from freedom (or, at least, the basement), Mrs. Wheeler intersected them. She stood atop the staircase, her silhouette outlined eerily by the orange lamp-light at her back. "Would you boys like some tea?" she asked, her voice sickly-sweet. It was quite obvious that Richie's sobbing fit had inspired this offer, of course.

'Tea? What is this, England?' Mike chuckled internally.

Richie seemed to have reverted back his old self for the time being. "Tea? What is this, England?" he mumbled underneath his breath. His brain had supplied this quip within itself.

Mike blanched. *'Holy shit. He heard what I was thinking!'*

Richie and Mike looked over at each other in unison, their brows furrowed, mouths unhinged.

'What the fuck was that? I heard you in my head!' Richie demanded. His brows danced, but his mouth remained closed. It, in all honesty, made him look completely Loony Tunes.

'I don—' Mike's thoughts continued, but Richie couldn't hear them. The connection, for whatever reason, was lost. It was almost as if their line of communication had suddenly been cut. Mike, however, didn't know that Richie couldn't hear him, so he went on an insane tangent about telepathy.

Out loud, Richie answered Mrs. Wheeler's offer on behalf of the both of them. His words came out before he had really processed them (that wasn't very unusual for Richie, since his brain-to-mouth filter wasn't very in-check) and he found himself in a situation he wished

he could've avoided. "No thanks, Mom. We're fine."

Mike's thought process went silent. He could only stare at Richie, mouth unhinged.

Mrs. Wheeler played Richie's use of 'mom' nonchalantly, but it was made clear that she was tickled-pink with his choice of words. "All right, sweetie..." she said. "Call me if you need anything else." Then she walked off, heels clicking.

Mike pulled Richie into the basement by his wrist. He did so rather forcefully, but Richie didn't say anything about it. They were brothers and, though he'd never actually had one until now, he knew that brothers didn't always get along. Mike sat down on the couch and pulled Richie onto the cushion beside him. "Do you have any idea what actual *hell* is going on?" Mike demanded, his voice low. "This is crazy! We can talk inside of our heads!"

"I have no fuckin' clue..." Richie shook his head. "It's like we have *twin telepathy*."

"Like I said... well, *thought*... before, it's weird because we haven't known—"

"Our, like, mind connection trick..." Richie held each of his index fingers to their coinciding temples "...shorted out or something. I didn't hear anything about twin telepathy. All I heard was when you said that you could hear me. After that, my own thoughts. Did you not hear mine?"

"No, after you said that you could hear me, I didn't hear anything else..." Mike trailed off. He knew that their connection had broken or had been obstructed when Richie had called Mrs. Wheeler 'mom' because Mike was sure that Richie's mind had been reeling after having done so. Their connection, it seemed, had been initiated unintentionally and had broken off the same way. Their conversation had only lasted seconds— maybe even milliseconds. Brains sent messages and signals pretty fast.

"So... we can talk to each other with our brains, but we don't know how to. It was unintentional from the very start," Richie said slowly.

Several seconds went by, then, "This is fuckin' insane, Mike." Richie took off his specs, rubbed his eyes with his thumb and index finger, and slipped them back on the bridge of his nose.

"I know, it's..." Once more, Mike trailed off. It seemed that, because of this whole telepathy thing, his thoughts were untameable. He wondered if his untamable thoughts were a result of *Richie* being his twin brother, for Richie was about as untamable as they come. Suddenly, he was struck with remembrance. "You never told me what was happening back in your old town, you know. What made you... freak out."

Richie nodded once. "Uh-huh..." He lowered his gaze to his fiddling hands. His legs, too, were bouncing to some sort of strange rhythm. Anxiety-ridden, even Mike could tell. Richie, however, found it in himself to continue— to explain. "I live... well, I *lived*... in a town with weird secrets. And..." he trailed off, lifting his head to look over at Mike skeptically. "Promise you won't laugh and take this seriously?"

When Mike nodded his head, Richie went on, "Well... last year, my friend Bill's little brother, Georgie, went missing. Then, more kids started disappearing and the town was really doing basically nothing about it. It was like the adults didn't even care that kids were disappearing. The only thing they did was set a county-wide curfew and hope that these kids would find their way home. The kids, yanno, *wouldn't* find their way home. Er... *couldn't*. So, the summer after Georgie went missing— last summer— Bill was like 100% sure that Georgie was still alive, so he made me and my friends look for him, but we all knew that he was dead. I mean, he'd been missing for 9 months. It was a given, but Bill still had hope. It turns out that Georgie had been taken and killed by a child-eating, shape-shifting clown that lived in the sewers underneath our town."

Richie paused for a moment to gauge the severity of Mike's reaction. Mike, however, had barely reacted at all. His brows were furrowed with either thought or confusion. It was probably, most likely both.

"So this clown, which we called 'It' could shape-shift into our worst fears. It creeped us out for the entire summer. It turns out that the only way to make sure that It doesn't kill you is to convince yourself

that you aren't afraid of It because, well, It feeds off of your fear. So, at the end of August, when one of my friends, Beverly, had been taken by It, the rest of my friends and I went down into the sewers and fought it. We thought that we had killed it because it fell into one of the pipes in the cistern, but we didn't know for sure. A little while after, before I left, we made a promise to come back if It ever came back, too. If It wasn't dead. A whole-ass blood pact, actually." He held out his left hand in an offering, the same way that he had back in the Barrens. Mike looked down at it. The scar from the Coca-Cola bottle was, of course, still there, and it probably will be for his entire life. It was still quite red, for he had a habit of reopening the scar whenever was bored, but he hadn't touched it in a while and it was slowly but surely turning pink. Subconsciously, he knew that he would never be able to let it fully heal.

"Well, it turns out that It survived the fall, has healed Itself, and wants to kill us again. It hasn't necessarily come back to Derry, but It came to Portland, where Bev lives now, and messed with her a little bit. She escaped this time. The call that I got was from my friend Stanley and he told me about what happened with Beverly because, well... now we know that It can come here, too. To Hawkins. If It wants to kill me, then It'll come here."

Richie found himself speaking all-too-bluntly, but he knew that he was making his point. After he had fallen silent, somewhat content with his jumbled explanation, nearly an entire minute went by before Mike said anything. "So... a shape-shifting clown wants to kill you and your friends?" Richie nodded. "If it shape-shifts into your worst fears, how do you know that it's not genuinely what you fear the most?"

"It's not very good at hiding It's identity. I mean, one of my worst fears are werewolves, and I don't think I'd randomly run into a werewolf on the street. I'd be fuckin' scared, but I'd know that it was It. Also, well... I'm scared of clowns, and It's usually consistent on It's clown appearance."

"You're scared of clowns?"

Richie nodded fervently. "Those dickheads are *scary*. You can't tell what the person underneath all the makeup looks like. It's fuckin'

unsettling."

"You know, Dustin hates clowns, too. Some dude dressed as a clown walked into the arcade for someone's birthday party or something and Dustin practically bolted out of there. It's shocking 'cuz he loves the arcade and that clown completely ruined it for him. He didn't go in there for the rest of the week."

"I wouldn't either..." Richie admitted. The mere thought of that clown, all dressed up, strolling into the arcade made his skin crawl. Ever since It, his fear, of course, had magnified. Now, all of the Losers' were scared of clowns, but none to Richie's extent.

That fear was different.

Notes for the Chapter:

thank u so much for reading! my heart is full!

5. what's done is done

Notes for the Chapter:

the first part of this chapter before the break is basically a half-assed filler. we love an inconstant queen (someone stop me).

well... i hope you like this chapter despite that! the next one will be epic, so be prepared ;))

Feeling out-of-place, Richie sat down tentatively into the chair next to Mike at the Wheelers' dinner table.

Mrs. Wheeler had gone all-out. There were not one, but *two* forks and *two* spoons beside each plate. It looked as if she had taken out her best china. There was a bowl of salad in the middle of the table, and Richie noticed Ted eyeing the bowl skeptically. Mashed potatoes, stringed beans, and chicken were piled on serving plates, steaming, obviously fresh out of the oven. The smell was enticing.

Nancy was sat on Richie's left, her ankles crossed as if she were trying her very best to look somewhat presentable. The look on her face, however, which Richie could personally recognize as complete and utter disinterest, ruined the effect of which she had been trying for. Mrs. Wheeler sat across from Mike, looking rather pleased with herself for having made all of this, her cheeks faintly flushed. Holly sat to her left, staring confusedly at Richie, her bootie-clad feet swinging. Ted, of course, looked eager... that is, to eat. He did, however, look over at Richie several times, perhaps to scrutinize him.

Mrs. Wheeler then announced that they would bless the food, and before Richie even knew what was happening, his hands had been clasped into Mike and Nancy's. His former mother and father weren't all that religious, to be frank. He *could* faintly remember going to church when he was much, much younger, but he associated those feelings as... restless. He remembered complaining, for, at that age, his stamina was nonexistent. For some reason, he can't remember why or when he stopped going. Mrs. Wheeler finished off by blessing God for 'Richie's return' as she had deemed it. Calling him moving

here his 'return' was peculiar, Richie noticed, but he said nothing of it.

After a mumbled 'Amen', Mike and Nancy dropped his hands, immediately reaching across the table for the serving plates. Ted told them to slow down, but neither did so. It appeared that he had only reprimanded them so that the food wouldn't be gone before *he* could get to it. He filled his own plate, however, with mostly chicken, which Nancy had none of. Richie scooped a considerate amount off of each plate and onto his own.

"So, Richie..." Mrs. Wheeler said as she scooped a small helping of mashed potatoes onto Holly's plate. "If you don't mind me asking, what was it like back in Maine?" It was conversation to fill the silence, Richie knew, but he decided that he'd have to respond.

He set down his fork. He could feel himself shutting down. His words were passive. "*Really* cold in the winter. *Really* hot in the summer. It was usually either, or. I lived in a small, conservative town where... nothing ever really happened. Like a whole bunch of old, retired people."

"You lived..." Ted swallowed a mouthful of chicken, then went on, "...in Derry?"

Richie nodded curtly.

Ted furrowed his brow, jabbing his fork in Richie's vicinity. "I thought I read something in the newspaper about some teenage boy kidnapping and killing a bunch of children there. Are we talking about the same one? The same Derry? I remember it was spelled weird. D-E-R-R-Y, I think."

Mrs. Wheeler sent him a look. This was obviously not a conversation for the dinner table. Mike lifted his head for where he had been lent over his beans. He looked over at Richie, gauging his reaction. Holly was idly poking holes into her mashed potatoes with her fingers. Mrs. Wheeler hadn't noticed yet, having been too busy trying to make her husband take a hint. Nancy finally looked interested in the conversation, gaze flickering from Richie to Ted.

"Yeah. He was a total psychopath. The town bully, at first. Then... *psychopath*. Had a mullet and everything." It felt weird pinning the missing kids on Henry Bowers, but it was what had to be done. Who would believe that an alien clown was responsible for the deaths of all those kids?

"Yeah, I read that he killed his pop, too. Kids are messed up. D'you know if he got the death penalty?"

Mrs. Wheeler had had enough. "Ted! This is *not* the time and place for this conversation!"

Holly immediately froze, index finger still submerged in a sea of smudged mashed potatoes. She looked over at her mother, wide-eyed. Such heated tone had left her startled, but thankfully not the point of crying.

Ted nodded wordlessly, catching the drift. He went back to eating his chicken as if nothing had happened. Holly blinked.

Richie speared a piece of chicken and shoved it into his mouth. He hadn't eaten meat in a while. When his mother had taken sick, he ate most of his meals either at the hospital or at Stan's, and the Uris' ate kosher for almost every meal. He ate over at Eddie's sometimes too, but that was only when Mrs. K was out running errands. Also, Mike Hanlon was *strongly* against eating meat, so he and the other Losers had grown accustomed to not taking meat when it was an option. He couldn't tell if he missed eating it or not. It wasn't all that great.

And then, it seemed, came the purpose of this family dinner. Richie could tell what was coming beforehand. There was an odd feeling in the air of which caused him to realize its looming imminence. Mrs. Wheeler set down her fork and folded her hands delicately in her lap. "I'd just like to say again that I'm really sorry for what I've done to you two. It's unforgivable, and it's—"

"It's okay..." Richie said passively at the same time that Mike snapped fiercely, "It is unforgivable!"

They looked at each other, brows knit.

Richie, to tell the truth, was sick and tired of all this fighting. Mrs. Wheeler was right— she had done some pretty fucked-up things in the past, but it had all turned out all right in the end, and that, he supposed, was what mattered. He didn't want to dwell on the past anymore. He was, all in all, *tired* of it.

Mike, in contrast, was the *king* of grudges, but he supposed that if Richie, who was most affected by Mrs. Wheeler's decision thirteen years ago, forgave her, then he would have to, too. With a sigh, avoiding eye-contact, he mumbled, "Richie's right."

Richie bit his lip. He looked over at his mother, who was smiling broadly. He wondered if he was making the right decision. Sure, it felt like a weight had lifted off of his shoulders, but it still left him skeptical. He *knew* she didn't deserve forgiveness, but he also knew that she was family and he would *have* to forgive her eventually. He didn't know how long he would be able to stay here because of It's possible return, but he would like to make his time here worth it, and holding grudges is fucking *tiring*.

Ted Wheeler had obviously not read into the conversation. Suddenly, he commended through a mouthful of chicken, "Oh, and Richie..." Having heard his name called, Richie looked over at him, brows raised expectantly. "You're starting school tomorrow. No need wasting time."

Mrs. Wheeler whirled around to face her husband, eyes flashing. He had obviously ruined what she deemed as a 'moment'

Richie only sighed.

Mike, however, had no filter when it came to his feelings of anger. He protested passionately on Richie's behalf, "What?! But he *just* got here! He's been here for less than a day!"

Mrs. Wheeler took reason (and her husband's side, not-so-coincidentally), insisting, "Tomorrow's Monday, and you're going to school, Michael. You can't miss any more days or you'll get behind. Richie would be sitting here alone while you're at school, bored out of his mind."

"But—"

"Not but's!" Mrs. Wheeler exclaimed, conclusive. "It's final."

To show that she wouldn't negotiate anymore about school, she turned her attention back to Holly, who was blissfully unaware of what was happening.

Underneath his breath, Richie mumbled, "Aw, *fuck* me..."

Mike was only one that heard. "I feel the same way..." he muttered back.

The next morning, bright-and-*freaking*-early, Richie found himself on his way to his first day at Hawkins Middle. Mrs. Wheeler drove both him and Mike (Nancy, as per usual, rode with her boyfriend, Steve) in her pristine, expensive-looking station wagon. It was unusually cold outside, and even with the heater *blasting*, it was still fucking *freezing*. Mike would usually ride his bike to school, meeting up his friends along the way, but Mrs. Wheeler insisted that he ride with her since she needed to register Richie with the school and it was, in all honestly, way too *freaking* cold to be biking. His mother was probably going to have some trouble getting Richie officially registered since she hadn't technically adopted him back yet, but she was hoping that they'd *at least* let him follow Mike around to his classes.

Mike sat shotgun, his arms crossed over his chest, gazing out at the trees blurring by. Richie sat in the seat behind him, fiddling nervously with a pair of gloves that Mrs. Wheeler had forced him to wear. He was secretly planning on taking them off as soon as she was out of sight. Mike sniffled a few times.

After a relatively short car ride, they rolled up to the school. It was still somewhat early, so there weren't as many kids aimlessly walking around campus. Mrs. Wheeler pulled into an empty parking space near the entrance of the school and turned off the car. "Make sure to behave yourselves, boys..." she demanded, stepping out into the cold. "I *don't* want a call from your principal again, Michael. One time was already enough. You've already been suspended once." Slamming the car door closed, Richie looked over at Mike, his brows raised in

question. He could only assume Mike's call from the principal had something to do with his quite obvious problems when it came to controlling his anger.

Mike nodded as if to say that he would tell Richie later. Turning around, Richie and Mike followed as Mrs. Wheeler approached the front doors, her heels clicking dully against the concrete. Both boys had backpacks precariously slung over their shoulders, but it was quite obvious which was more taken care of. Richie's had doubled as a suitcase for his journey halfway across the country, so it was basically a *given* that his had seen more and was, in turn, beaten up.

As they walked into the school, only several pairs of searching eyes followed them. Walking side-by-side, looking almost identical except for the pair of chunky glasses resting on Richie's nose, the boys looked... bizarre, to say the very least.

Suddenly, Mrs. Wheeler took a sharp left and veered into the front office, her shoulders set back with purpose. She stood before the front desk and spoke politely to the lady behind it about enrolling Richie into the school. Their voices were white noise, fading into the background as Richie's eyes traveled around the room. There was a wall full of class pictures from previous years, dating all the way back to 1961. Something, however, told him that kids had been attending this school from much, much longer. It was called Hawkins Middle, and it was certainly the only middle school in town.

There were several other offices stemming off of the main room, all with closed doors. There were six chairs pulled against the wall adjacent to the front desk. All were empty except for two. In one, sat the redheaded chick from the arcade, lent far back into the chair as if she would rather be anywhere else than here. An older redheaded woman, who Richie could only assume to be her mother, was sat next to her, her ankles crossed idly. When Richie accidentally met the woman's eyes, she smiled at him. He smiled back, thin-lipped, and quickly avoided her gaze.

Mike's attention was elsewhere. He eyed the chick from the arcade almost... skeptically. He hadn't said even a word to her, yet he was still untrusting. Max chose this precise moment to look around the room, her fluttering eyes catching on him. After several moments of

scrutiny, she realized where she had recognized him from. Then, her searching gaze shifted over to Richie, who she too remembered. This time, however, she smiled.

Richie returned the smile crookedly, pleased with the fact that he had made at least *one* additional friend in Hawkins. Mike looked over, saw his brother's reaction, and elbowed him swiftly in the stomach. Richie winced, letting out an instinctive, louder-than-expected "Ow!" to express his pain. He scowled, whisper-shouting angrily into Mike's ear, "What the *fuck* was that for?!"

Mike sent him a look as if he had been expecting Richie to already know why he'd been elbowed in the first place. When Richie only looked at him, just as confused as he had been before, Mike explained slowly, "Your goo-goo eyes for the redhead..."

"What the hell are you talking about? Goo-goo eyes? I don't know this chick, like, *at all* and it's obvious that your freaky-nerd friends like her. Like, yanno, *like* like her."

"My 'freaky-nerd' friends?"

"Yeah, Damien and Luke..." Richie said as if he were stating the obvious.

"It's *Dustin* and *Lucas*, you dipshit!" Mike pinched the bridge of his nose, exasperated. "It's not that hard to remember!"

"Yeah, whatever..." Richie waved his hands in a dismissive way. "Tomayto, tomahto. Same thing."

"Not really..." Mike rolled his eyes.

"*Yah*, really..." Richie countered.

"Shut up, Richie. You're stupid."

"*"Shut up, Richie. You're stupid."* Just because he felt like it, Richie mimicked him, raising his voice several octaves to make it sound 'more genuine'.

"Wow... Real mature." Mike said sarcastically.

"Wow... *Real mature.*" Richie parroted, grinning.

"Stop it!"

"*Stop it!*"

"I don't sound like that!"

"*I don't sound like that!*"

Their volume had slowly escalated into full-on shouts on both parts, and Mrs. Wheeler was... vexed, to say the least. "Be quiet, both of you!" she said sternly. Like a mother would to a misbehaving toddler, she pointed her finger disapprovingly at them. The lady behind the desk eyed the two boys with an eyebrow raised. Mike and Richie shared a look, then obediently quieted down.

Richie took a seat in the chair next to Max, straightening his glasses. Mike sat on his other side. He rubbed his nose idly and sniffled. He knew that he was sick, not terribly so, but fairly. If this were another day, he would most likely have been able to convince his mother to let him stay home from school, but it was Richie's first day. He would probably be dead confused if Mike weren't there with him. Mike, however, was beginning to have his doubts as he looked over and saw Richie talking to Max animatedly about something-or-other. Mike wasn't really listening. Richie would probably have been *fine* by himself— he was an independent, sociable person— but Mike being here, he supposed, was a kind of reassurance.

After about five minutes (which were spent with Mike pulling on a loose thread of his sweater, bored out of his mind, and Richie blabbering away to Max), Mrs. Wheeler finished her conversation with the lady behind the desk. She ambled over to her sons. Richie, having seen her approaching, finally shut up, looking up at her expectantly. "Richie, you'll follow Mike to his classes until your records are sent from your old school." Richie nodded resolutely. He wondered if all of his demerits and detentions would be on that record. He shook the thought away. Mrs. Wheeler then turned to Max. "You're Maxine, correct?"

Surprised to have been addressed, Max did nothing but blink for

several seconds. "It's Max..." she corrected Mrs. Wheeler, not unkindly. "Not Maxine."

Mrs. Wheeler nodded. "I've been told that you'll also follow my son, Michael, to his classes." She motioned toward Mike, who looked less than thrilled to have her follow him around all day. Also, he *hated* being called 'Michael' in public. It was highly unnerving. "They're also waiting on your records..." To Mike, she asked, "Why don't you take them to meet your friends?"

"They already have. We've already met. All of us met at the arcade yesterday..." Mike said as he inattentively pulled the thread he had been working on completely loose. His sweater was scrunched-up a bit, but he didn't care.

"Even better..." she said with finality. And with that, she turned on her heel and walked out of the door, the familiar sound of clicking heels following her out.

This seemed to have shocked Mrs. Mayfield out of her previous silence. She then turned to Max and patted down her fiery red hair. "Have fun today..."

Max scowled, swatting her mother's hands away. "How can school *possibly* be fun?" Mrs. Mayfield only shrugged before trailing Mrs. Wheeler out of the door.

Richie then turned to Mike and complained passionately, "This sucks! I can't believe your mom forced us to come!"

Mike raised an eyebrow. "First of all, it's 'our mom', Richie. Get used to it. Secondly, this isn't that surprising. She probably just wants the both of us out of the house. I mean, I bet that after we're all in school, Dad's at work, and Holly's at daycare she—"

Before he could finish, the lady behind the desk interrupted him. It was probably for the best, anyway. The woman had a thick Scottish accent of which instantly made Richie excited. "Bugger off, kids. It's not cool to be hanging 'round the office."

A boy-grin made its way onto Richie's face. He stood quickly, saluting

the woman clumsily. He then pulled an imitation of her accent, which would've probably gotten him into major trouble with *anyone* else. "Sure thang, lass! Top of tha mornin' to ya!" Before she could react, he scurried out of the office, Mike and Max in tow. A ways down the hallway, he stopped. He then started spinning around in circles like an absolute madman, laughing crazily.

Max watched Richie, amused. Her brows were furrowed, but there was a smile on her face.

Mike, however, looked beyond pissed (not an unusual emotion for *him*). "Stop, Richie! You've only been here for ten minutes and you're making a complete fool out of yourself!"

It was true. About a dozen students were converging in the hallways, chatting animatedly with their friends. When they had pass, they had to maneuver themselves around Richie. Some sent him confused looks, others couldn't care less.

"No..." Richie said, pulling off his specs as he twirled. "I'm making a fool out of you!" There was a moment of pause, then, "Hey everyone! I'm Mike Wheeler! Look at me!"

Max couldn't control her laughter anymore, and decided to embrace the feeling. She doubled over, clutching her sides as she chuckled. Mike scowled at her before turning sharply to Richie.

"**RICHIE STOP!**" he screamed, eyes wide with alarm (and embarrassment). He stormed over to Richie, practically fuming. He took hold his arms, forcing him to stop spinning. He shoved the specs back on Richie's face, missing once and accidentally poking him in the eye. Richie let out a small exclamation of pain, but Mike ignored him, finally managing to put the glasses on correctly. Max's laughing fit faded as quick as it had come.

Richie's surroundings spun madly for several seconds before his vision finally cleared out and he was able to accurately gauge the situation. Mike stood before him, face flaming. "You don't want to get a demerit on the first day, dipshit. Mom will *kill* you," he snarled.

"Yeah, yeah, *Grumpy Pants*... I'm sorry," Richie muttered, rubbing his

eye from underneath his specs. "She still feels guilty, I can tell. She probably doesn't care what we do..." He let his own words settle. After several seconds, however, he remembered that Mike hadn't exactly been the best student. "Oh my, God. Mike, how did you get suspended, anyway?"

Max looked over at Mike, her brows raised. "You got suspended?" It sounded as if she couldn't, in a million years, believe that such thing could happen to *Mike Wheeler*. "I bet you were framed."

Richie let out a chuckle. "I bet it was his severe anger issues."

"Shut up, Richie!" Mike snarled. "I don't have anger issues!" Several seconds went by before he realized exactly *how* he had responded to the claim. He winced, not at Richie, but at himself.

"*And*, my point is proven..." Smirking, Richie crossed his arms.

"*Jesus Christ...*" Mike muttered, exasperated. Rolling his eyes, he suddenly started down the hallway. Richie and Max struggled to not be left behind, nearing tripping over their own feet. Mike appeared to know exactly where he was headed, for his strides looked to have been taken with purpose.

"Where are we going?" Max asked out of curiosity, but it appeared that Mike hadn't deemed the question worthy enough to actually answer. Their sneakers thudded against the linoleum, breaths thin.

Mike led them out of two double doors and into the courtyard. The cold, brisk air was a sucker-punch to the face. It sent a shiver down his spine, and, in an attempt to stay warm, he shoved his hands deep into his pockets, sniffing once. He envied Richie, who had on gloves of which Mrs. Wheeler had forced him to wear. She had originally tried to make Mike wear them, but he had refused, so she moved over to Richie and had eventually been able to coax them onto his hands. He was tempted to ask Richie for at least *one* glove.

There were students all around, grouped in clusters, chatting with their friends before classes started. No one seemed to care about how cold it was. It seemed that everyone would rather stand outside in the freezing cold than in the stuffy school building with blood-thirsty

teachers on the prowl.

After scanning the crowd for a solid twenty seconds, he eventually managed to locate his friends, who stood off to the side. He looked over his shoulder to see if Max and Richie had actually followed him and was pleased to see them standing there, hands in their pockets, watching him expectantly. He had to practically *shove* his way through a throng of girls before he made it to his friends, Max and Richie close behind.

"Hey, guys..." Mike greeted his friends, short and to-the-point. He took to stand beside Will, who had been bundled up in two heavy-looking jackets (Mrs. Byers was probably responsible for that). Will smiled brightly at him in greeting. Lucas and Dustin (both of whom had previously been in a rather heated debate regarding Mr. Clarke's latest project) turned at the sound of Mike's voice. Their eyes went wide as soon as they spotted Max standing there, shuffling her feet. They immediately recognized her as the 'pretty girl from the arcade'. Lucas gulped.

"Max..." he sputtered, sounding surprised. She looked over at him, brows raised. "I didn't know you'd be here today."

"Well, I am..." she announced, lifting her shoulders as if to say 'who knew?'.

Richie rolled his eyes. "Wow, I feel so recognized and loved..." he drawled sarcastically, smiling nevertheless.

Dustin thumped him once on the back. "Oh, *hello*, Richie..." he said slowly— dramatically. "How are *you* doing?"

"Why, I'm doing *fine*, thank you..." Richie said in his Southern Belle Voice, earning several pairs of raised eyebrows. "You're a *doll*, dahling. A real *doll*."

Max chuckled, "What the hell was *that*?"

"*That* was a small sample of Richie's weird-ass sense of humor," Mike said with a smirk.

"At least I *have* a sense of humor, *Grumpy Pants*," Richie countered.

Mike scowled.

He opened his mouth, a biting retort on the tip of his tongue. Just before he got the words out, however, Max spoke harshly over him, "Please don't start fighting again. It's getting old."

Mike whirled around to face her, eyes flashing. "If you don't like us fighting then you should just leave!" he bit back.

"I would leave, *Mike*, but I can't..." Max insisted. "I have to follow you two *dimwits* around until my old school sends over my records." She crossed her arms, her face set in confidence. She wouldn't let him crawl underneath her skin. His words left a dull ache behind, but she wouldn't let it show. She wondered how Mike saw her— what had caused him to hate her so easily. Richie had been so *nice* to her while Mike had been anything but. She found connecting with Richie much easier. She didn't know much about him, but she came to realize that they had many things in common.

Mike said nothing. He simply averted his gaze.

"So, Max, Richie..." Dustin broke the silence. "You're following Mike to his classes?"

"Yeah, both of us don't have our records yet," Max explained. "Though, I'm not thrilled for this school to see what's on my records. It's not... the cleanest."

"Fuck..." Richie cheered in likeness. "Me either. I wasn't the *best* kid back at my old school."

"Honestly, that's not surprising for *either* of you," Dustin admitted, brows raised. "Anyway, we don't have *exactly* the same classes as Mike. We're all in science together, though. Mike has English without us. Will's the only one in his math class and I'm the only one in his History class. We all have lunch together, too."

"This school is way smaller than my old one," Max observed as she looked out at the other students in the courtyard. "We had three different lunches. It was also pretty rare to have classes with your friends."

"Mine was even smaller than this one..." Richie pointed out. "I didn't have any classes without at least two of my friends. It feels strange to be going back to middle school, though. I thought that I'd graduated from it last year. At my old school, 8th graders were part of the high school building. I was only in high school for two weeks, though, before I... came here."

"Where were you from anyway?" Will asked out of curiosity.

"I was from Derry, Maine..." Richie answered truthfully. "But my friends and I called it 'hell' because, well, it was."

"Derry..." Lucas repeated very slowly, trying out the name for himself. "I feel like I've heard that name before. I don't know where, though."

"You might've seen it in the newspaper. Mike's dad did."

"Our da—" Mike started

Richie went on as if he hadn't been interrupted, "A bunch of kids went missing last year. Like I said before, it was hell."

"Missing kids? What happened to them?" Lucas asked.

Richie wracked his brain for *something* to use to build off of the newspaper's story. He hadn't read it for himself, but he supposed that he could make a fairly solid story from knowing that Henry Bowers had been blamed for the murder of all of those kids. "Well, in Derry they're these copycat killers that take kids every twenty-seven years or so. You probably read something about the recent one."

Something told him that if he didn't inform Mike's friends adequately, they would go around researching the Derry killings and eventually connect the dots.

"Copycat killer? I didn't read anything about—" Lucas was cut short by the brash sound of the bell.

"We'll talk later..." Richie said to Lucas before he turned on his heels and followed Mike back into the school building, Max by his side.

"You win the more interesting town contest, Rich..." she muttered as

she adjusted her backpack strap. He smiled at her.

Notes for the Chapter:

richie and max
are best friends
you can't change my mind

6. all aboard the crazy train

Notes for the Chapter:

me? with an update six days later? what the fuck is this?

i updated soon, as promised. i had a lot of plans for this chapter, but i realized that i would probably have to split it in two, so here's the first half. i should have the second half of this chapter, technically chapter seven, up by like next week probably. maybe it'll take me six days... or maybe even sooner. i'm indecisive and very critical when it comes to writing. i rewrite like a zillion times.

well, i hope u like it anyway!

English passed by in a blurry haze. Their teacher was as old as dirt, and *almost* as interesting. She looked to have been trying for that 'grandma chic' kind of look, as Richie had deemed it in his head, but had failed miserably. Her knee-length pencil skirt, her stockings of which had an enormous rip down one side, her oddly-pattered and, not to mention, *starched* sweater, and her half-moon specs earned her the appearance of a school librarian, and nothing at all about it was chic. Richie wouldn't have been surprised if she doubled as both the school librarian and the English teacher. This school already looked like an understaffed train-wreck.

Thankfully, she made neither Richie nor Max introduce themselves to the class. She told them that they were welcome to sit beside Mike (someone must have told her about their situation), and then didn't address them for the rest of class. She read aloud from the curriculum-instated book, which she was already half-way finished with. Max and Richie were both lost on the plot and found themselves zoning out more often than not. Mike did his best to explain what was happening, but it went in one ear and out the other. Besides, Mike hadn't been paying that much attention either.

And it didn't help that Richie could feel eyes on him for nearly the

entire class. His arrival was probably confusing from an outsider's point-of-view. He hoped that there weren't rumors already and that people suspected the truth (or, at least, an abridged version of it). He and Mike were simply two twin brothers separated at birth, finally reunited. No need to elaborate. It was all they needed to know. It wasn't that interesting... right?

Finally, the sound of the bell indicated the end of class and their teacher dismissed them, announcing their absence (thankfully) of homework. Mike told them that their next class was science and led them out of the door and into the crowded hallway. Their science classroom was only several doors down, so they were of the first to arrive.

The very second, it seemed, that they stepped into the classroom, the teacher (a smart-looking dude in his mid-thirties with a giant, bushy mustache, clad in a sweater vest) greeted them cheerfully. "Mike!" he exclaimed, a broad smile on his face. He seemed to have been awfully close with Mike, which only reinforced Richie's suspicion (it was more of a fact now) that his brother wasn't very popular here. "I've been really excited to meet your bro—" The teacher's eyes shifted over to Richie, who blinked several times in response. "Oh! Is this him?" He hadn't waited for an answer. It wasn't really much of a question, anyway. It was clear as day that Richie was Mike's twin brother. Identical, at that. "I didn't know that you two were twins! I'm Mr. Clarke, your science teacher..." He held out his hand for Richie, an enthusiastically hopeful look in his eyes.

"Richie Tozier, sir..." he introduced himself, grinning broadly as he pumped Mr. Clarke's hand several times.

"When I first heard that you'll be with Mike in this class, I was excited to meet you. No one ever told me you two were twins, though. And you're so uncannily similar that I have to assume that you're identical. Am I wrong?"

"No, you're right..." Mike said. He sniffled once, rubbing his nose.

Mr. Clarke rammed his hands into the pockets of his corduroy slacks. "You know, I've read on countless occasions stories about identical twins having telepathic connections..."

Holy shit.

Richie and Mike shared a wide-eyed look. A quite obvious one, at that, of which defiantly didn't go unnoticed by Max. With furrowed brows, she eyed them suspiciously.

Mr. Clarke went on, "I mean, it *is* peculiar, and it isn't even backed up with scientific evidence, but there are so many things about the brain that we can and will never understand. It wouldn't be surprising if twin telepathy was an actual thing. Wouldn't it be wild if you could hear each other's thoughts?"

At this precise moment, Dustin, Will, and Lucas trailed into the class. Richie turned back to Mr. Clarke and smiled passively. "Totally wild. Though, I don't know if I want Mike to hear *all* of my thoughts..." he admitted.

"Understandable..." Mr. Clarke nodded several times, then pursed his lips. "I've also heard a lot about twins and their instinctual feelings. Like how one twin can sense what the other is feeling. Perhaps if the other is in danger. It's quite fascinating, you know. Oh, and I also—"

The sound of the bell cut Mr. Clarke's not-so-fun fun-fact short, and he motioned for them to head to their desks. However, before Richie and Max could settle into the two empty seats at the back of the class, Mr. Clarke stuck out his hand and stopped them both. "You two aren't getting away *that* easy..." he said with a smile. He motioned to the front of the room. "Come on. Don't be shy..." Mike looked back at the sound of Mr. Clarke's voice, realizing what was happening. He and Richie shared an alarmed look as he lowered himself into his usual seat, shrugging as if to say 'what could be done?'

Twenty sets of searching eyes bore in Max and Richie as they stood at the front of the room. Max avoided any and all eye-contact, staring down at her sneakers. Richie, however, looked out upon the sea of students. He straightened his specs, blinking owlishly.

"Class, I'd like to introduce you to two of our newest students..." Mr. Clarke declared dramatically. "All the way from sunny, sandy California... Maxine! And, our fellow classmate, Mike's, twin brother from the beautiful state of Maine... Richie! The latest passengers on

our curiosity voyage!" No one clapped. Everyone stared.

It was silent, until; "My name is Max, sir. Not Maxine." The said redhead shook her head as she corrected Mr. Clarke.

"Well, all aboard, Max!" Mr. Clarke announced cheerfully. "And you too, Richie!" He motioned toward the two seats at the back. Max and Richie scrambled toward them, wanting nothing more than to be out of the limelight. Mike and his friend's looked back at the two once they were settled, all with varying looks of sympathy. Mr. Clarke went back to his lesson and everything returned to normal.

On the chalk-board at the front of the class, it read: *You and your partner are instructed to find and identify five organisms from the wild and examine them. Please write a description about each organism and how said organism has affected its surrounding environment. Write down the organisms binomial nomenclature next to its more common, well known name! Good luck!* Richie read and re-read the words several times as Mr. Clarke went on about how well the Hawkins High School Mathletes team had done in their most recent competition.

Eventually, Mr. Clarke realized that he actually had to teach his students and started his lesson. He went on for almost an hour about plants and animals, leaving most of the class (save for Dustin, as per usual) bored out of their minds. Richie lent his head against his hand, his specs digging painfully into his nose. He was tempted to take them off, but was scared of how he'd look without them— more specifically, if he'd look exactly like Mike. His eyes drooped.

The second, it seemed, that he neared the cusp of dreamless sleep, a loud and sudden rustling thrust him back into reality. He straightened his specs and looked around, watching confusedly as the other students ambled around the classroom, chatting with their friends. Chancing a look behind him, he saw Max, who looked about as confused as he was.

Just before he could ask if she knew *anything at all* about what was happening, Mr. Clarke intervened. Will and Mike stood by his side. "Richie, Max..." he addressed them both with a nod. Mike sniffled. "I want you two to work together on this science project. If you need

any help, you can ask Mike and Will. Indirectly, you'll all work together, but you'll have to turn in your own project. All right?"

Max nodded once. Richie blinked.

"Richie?" Mr. Clarke asked as he not received an answer. "Is that clear?"

Having heard his name, Richie was once more thrust back into reality. "O-Oh, uh... Yeah, it's crystal."

"Good," Mr. Clarke said with a variation of finality. He then walked off in the direction of a kid with his hand raised.

The moment that he was out of earshot, Richie turned to Mike and asked, "What are we doing? I'm so fucking confused right now..."

Mike scoffed, "Well, maybe if you'd been *listening* then you would've kn—"

Will cut in, putting an absolute, fortunate end to Mike's retort, "You and Max are supposed to do the science project..." he pointed to the black-board, which had the instructions for the project scrawled onto it. "You're turning in your own project, I mean, but me and Mike are here to help you."

Richie grinned crookedly. "Thanks, William!" The nickname rolled easily off of his tongue without him even meaning to use it, but, of course, he was instantly reminded of his good friend Bill Denbrough, whose real name was actually William. He wondered, not for the first time, how the *heck* people got the nickname Bill out of the name William. It made no sense!

(He had also wondered on many, many, many occasions how in the world people coaxed the nickname Dick out of Richard. Well, he had a theory. Har-de-har-har.)

Will smiled sweetly as he offered the lot of them, "Well, we can look for some stuff for the project in the woods behind my house after school today. I mean, the project's due Wednesday, so we'll even have extra time. And we don't have too far to look since it's so cold and,

when we're done, my mom can make us hot chocolate. What do you guys say?"

"Hell to the yes!" Richie crooned in his Southern Belle Voice. "Praise the Lawd Almighty Jesus, Creator of Heaven and Earth!" After a moment, however, he remembered just who was responsible for him, and he turned to Mike, "I mean, uh... Can we? Please? I want hot chocolate *sooo* badly."

"We'll ask Mom..." Mike concluded. "She'll probably say yes, though."

"Oh, goody!" Richie went on in his botched Voice. "This is the best day of my whole, entire life!"

Max rolled her eyes, then allowed, "Yeah, I can probably come..." After a moment, however, she added, "But only for the hot chocolate."

Richie chuckled, "That's *exactly* my reason, dude!"

"Hey, Max! Look what I found!" Grinning toothily, Richie brandished a lone shiny, red leaf over his head. It wavered in the breeze.

Max, who had previously been hunkered over on her knees, half-assedly filtering through a mound of mostly-dead leaves, looked over at him and smiled. "Thank God..." she said as she pulled herself to her feet.

Several feet away, Mike and Will silently searched for their own organisms for their project. The air was still ridiculously, unusually frigid, but it wasn't as bad as it had been that morning. The wind, however, blew even harder than before, ripping into their exposed faces and leaving them numb. It rippled the tree branches, occupying the brittle silence. The cold followed them like a scepter of death, nevermore imminent.

Max took the leaf from Richie's glove-clad hand and rammed it into her rucksack. She then latched it shut. "We need one more. Something cool."

Richie let out an exasperated breath, which trickled visibly out of his

mouth as if it were cigarette smoke. Watching his breath dissipate in the air, he immediately longed for a smoke. Unsurprisingly, Eddie's voice swam in his head, *'Richie, those things are death sticks! One day, you're gonna have to pay for smoking so many! They'll get to your lungs and kill you! I'll be at your funeral, yeah, but I'll be mumbling about how I told you so!'*

Eddie's internal reprimand left him feeling conflicted. He missed Eddie a lot. Well... he missed *all* of the Losers, but he (rather guiltily) found himself longing for Eddie the most. He wanted a cigarette to let off some steam (quite literally) because he missed Eddie so terribly. At the same time, however, he found himself wanting to listen to Eddie's advice— to follow it as if it were God's Word.

He squashed down the feeling and forced his feet to move. Scanning the leafy forest floor, he searched for something acceptable (and easy) to use for his and Max's *stupid* science project. Who knew that finding *organisms* was actually pretty difficult?

Rustle. Rustle. Rustle.

At this sudden sound, immediately discernible as the rustling of leaves, everyone froze. Scared, searching eyes combed the forest, trying to locate the source of the sound. Eventually, one-by-one, everyone pulled themselves to their feet— slowly, deliberately, and quietly as to not attract attention.

"What was that?!" Mike whisper-shouted into Richie's ear.

"Hell if I knew!" Richie whispered back, threading his hands through his unruly hair. "Maybe it was a squirrel. We're probably overreacting. It's probably nothing."

"That didn't sound like nothing..." Max muttered, quietly coming up beside Richie. "It was heavy. It sounded like a person."

"A person?" Will murmured from beside Mike. "Maybe it was just Jonathan. He's probably just messing with us."

Richie nodded once to show that he understood. Before anyone could mentally process what was happening, however, he cupped his hands

around his mouth and shouted into the forest, "Jonny-Boy? Is that you?"

Mike sucked in a breath. He turned to Richie and muttered bitterly, "What if there's a murderer out there? Now they'll know we're here!"

"Relaaaaax, Michael..." Richie waved his hands dismissively. "We're *super* close to Will's house. We can run if we have to. I just wanna see what it is..." Mike retreated into his own thoughts. After a moment or two of no response, Richie tried once more, "Hello? Is anyone there?"

When no answer came, he started to feel like none would ever come. He had lost his chance. Then, it did; "Richie?!"

Whoever the hell was out there knew his name!

Trembling, Richie could feel the panic settle in, make room inside of his brain and burrow and burrow and burrow until it was ready to become a permanent resident.

"Hello?" he called out, voice wavering. "How do you know my name? What do you want from me?"

"Richie?!" it came once more.

Richie stumbled, finally coaxing his legs to move move move. Spinning around in circles, he frantically scanned the forest for the source of his name. Then, his eyes caught on something— or, more specifically, *someone*.

He nearly fainted out of shock.

It was Stan Uris, partially hidden by a cluster of trees.

"What the hell?!" Richie shouted. His voice echoed, provoking several birds from surrounding trees (likely crows from their panicked cawing) to retreat desperately into the skies above.

Stan's mouth fell open.

Neither can really remember what happened next, only that they found themselves in an embrace (it was an unusual position for

Stanley to be in, and Richie can remember vividly the feeling of utter surprise that struck him).

The moment lasted for only about ten seconds before Stan pulled away. His eyes fell down to his feet bashfully. It was only then, however, that Richie realized it:

Stan was not in his usual afternoon attire, which was always precisely calculated with the three variable of weather, comfort, and fashionability. In fact, he had on sweatpants and a sweatshirt and, to top it all off, he was barefoot. His feet were caked with dirt, stuck in between his toes. He was shivering and trembling, his lips an alarming and icy shade of purple. His nose was beet red, and his curls were unruly.

Richie had known Stan for almost his entire life, so he knew for a fact that his friend would never, ever wear pajamas outside of his own house. He wouldn't be caught dead that way. Richie was also fairly certain that even if Stan's house was on fire, he would take the time to slip on actual clothes before he ran out. That was just how he was.

But now, Stan looked like hell.

"What are you doing here? Why are you wearing that? What's going on?" Richie demanded, one after the other, his mind reeling. He couldn't think of with a single explanation for why, how, and what Stan was doing here in Hawkins (Well... he could, but he didn't want to think it, so he pushed it away). "What the fuck? What the fuck? What the fuck? I'm confused!"

"Well, suh-suh-so am I!" Stan stuttered out much like Bill would've. His teeth clattered faintly. "I do-don't know how I got here. I juh-just..." He trailed off, unable to form the words. He just couldn't.

Will stepped forward. "C'mon..." he motioned in the vicinity of his house. "Screw this science project. It's stupid anyway." He set his hand on Stan's shoulder and led him toward the house. "We have hot chocolate. The fireplace is on, too." Richie ushered Stan on his other side, but his mind was elsewhere.

Max and Mike shared an astonished look before trailing the others

inside.

Notes for the Chapter:

you want a hook? part of next chapter will have an eddie POV!

i've done richie's POV (indirectly) the entire story and it's time for a little change ;)

7. "batshit crazy"

Notes for the Chapter:

holy freaking guacamole! okay, so i didn't update AS promptly as before, but it was still pretty prompt... right? i updated on november 6th and it's currently the 19th. that's not TERRIBLE. it's bad, but not THAT BAD. i hope you'll like this chapter. it took quite a while because i didn't really have much of a plan for it. all i knew was that i wanted some eddie-action.

i wrote most of this while i was at home from school, sick. hope you like it anyway!

MONDAY OCTOBER 29, 1984

DERRY, MAINE

11:38 AM

When Eddie first opened his eyes, all he could see was white.

For a split second, he was *sure* that he had died and had started to panic because of it— there were so many things that he could've done on Earth, but missed out on. Then, as he blinked, his vision started to return and he realized that he wasn't, in fact, dead. Crisis averted.

He pushed himself to sit upright, and only then did he realize that he wasn't in his bed, but on... a park bench? He couldn't— not for the life of him— remember falling asleep here. The last thing that he could remember was...

Fuck.

He had come to realize (after having met the Losers, that is) that there are some things that you can never learn from your mother— important, necessary things. He used to be her little marionette doll, but now he's his own person (or as much as he can be without actually killing her). Before he had awoken in this place, he and his mother had gotten into an awfully nasty fight regarding (surprise,

surprise) Eddie's foul health. More specifically, of course, his lack thereof. He remembered storming up to his bedroom and throwing himself onto his bed, burrowing himself deep into his covers and eventually falling asleep. Now... he was here. Wherever *here* was.

There were storefronts all around him, he realized— unfamiliar ones, at that. Scanning the surrounding area, he realized that the brick building directly across the street from his current park bench was called Hawkins Laundry. In Derry, there was only one laundromat, and it was quite unoriginally called Derry Laundry.

Wait a second...

FRIDAY OCTOBER 26, 1984

DERRY, MAINE

12:53 PM

The Losers had tried to spend as much time with Richie as they could before he would eventually have to leave. He seemed compliant with it, all smiles and laughs. Eddie was sure that this was Richie's distraction— his escape following his mother's death. Perhaps leaving Derry was the best thing he could do if he really, truly wanted to escape. His excuse to leave was that he didn't want the law interfering with him staying back in Derry, but Eddie knew that Richie subconsciously *wanted* to move. Sure, he would miss everyone and everyone would miss him, but his subconscious mind knew what was right for him.

Richie's readiness to leave left both Bill and Stan baffled and even somewhat offended, but the others knew that it was gut instinct that Richie was chasing. Maybe his instincts would be wrong, after all, and he would be on the next bus back to Derry.

Eddie only wanted what was best for his friend. Sure, after he saw Richie carrying his battered-up backpack full of everything that he owned, his heart started to ache and he felt a little bit helpless, but he didn't want Richie to suffer, and if staying here made Richie suffer, then Eddie could deal with the pain. Richie was a naturally curious person, and he wanted to know what the rest of his family was like. He would have to find out things by himself.

Eddie and Richie would call each other, maybe even see each other at Thanksgiving or at Christmas. Richie would take that shitty Greyhound all the way back home and he would complain about how much colder it was in Derry. He would sip hot chocolate with the other Losers and maybe watch the annual Christmas movie marathon at the Aladdin, stuffing his face with those Christmas cookies that Bill's mom used to make Stan, Eddie, and him when they were younger.

All Eddie knew was that Derry sucked ten times more without Richie in it.

Richie and his friends stood idly at the bus station, huddled close for warmth. The bus was due to arrive soon, but it was bound to be at least a little bit late.

"Well..." Richie said after a moment. "I can't believe that I'm leaving. This is batshit, guys. What am I doing?"

"Yuh-Yuh-You're testing the wuh-waters..." Bill reassured him. His stutter was worse than usual, for stressful situations brought out the worst of it. Usually, he stuttered less than he had the previous summer, but it was still worse than it had been before his brother's disappearance. "You're suh-suh-seeing what life's like over thuh-there. This is yuh-your truh-truh-trial. If you huh-hate it, you can see if you can cuh-cuh-come back. Fuh-Fuh-Fuck the law, Rih-Rih-Rich. Stuh-Stan's mom will take you in if she huh-huh-has to. She, fuh-fuh-for whatever ruh-reason, likes yuh-yuh-you the best out of everyone."

"Moms have a tendency to be all over me, Big Bill. Your's would know. She's *obsessed* with me..." Richie insisted with a crooked smile. Then, after a moment, his funny-guy resolve broke and he was left, well... vulnerable. In a voice very unlike himself— one that you could call the Genuine Richie Tozier Voice— he admitted, "I'll miss you a lot, Bill." He set his hand on Bill's shoulder and coaxed him to look at him in the eyes. "Take care of everyone, all right? You're the ringleader whether you like it or not."

Bill nodded resolutely, "I wuh-wuh-will. Duh-Don't worry." Richie smiled and let his hand fall back to his side. He embraced Bill tightly and, after a moment, he pulled away.

Richie turned to the others and declared, his arms outstretched, "I'm gonna miss you losers!"

Suddenly, Bev rushed forward and wrapped her freckled arms around his torso. He welcomed the embrace, burrowing his nose into the crook of her neck. A sob escaped from her lips, but she couldn't find it in herself to care. She too had left Derry, so she knew what it felt like to be in both situations. She would also have to leave shortly after him. After several moments, she pulled out of the embrace. Tears swam freely in her blue eyes. She stood on her tippy-toes and pressed a kiss to his cheek. She patted his shoulder once as she stepped back.

Like the father that he was (or, at least, acted like), Mike Hanlon said, "Behave yourself, Richie. Don't go off doing anything stupid..." Before Richie even knew what he was doing, he pulled his friend into an embrace. Mike, who was about ten times stronger *and* better built than Richie was, nearly suffocated him as he reciprocated the hug, but Richie didn't complain. Eventually, he too pulled back and stood with the others.

"I thuh-think that it's an imp-puh-puh-possible thing to ask of Richie. Wuh-We know he'll duh-do something stupid and guh-get himself in truh-truh-trouble..." Bill pointed out smartly.

Ben nodded, "Only God can help him now."

"Hey!" Richie exclaimed in mock hurt. "I can take care of myself!"

"Your family, I bet, is gonna murder you. You'll find yourself in some sort of trouble..." Stan said with a controlled smile.

"Rich just needs to work on his common sense. Besides that, he's practically a child prodigy..." Mike admitted.

Richie scoffed. "Am not..." he responded as he rubbed the back of his neck bashfully.

"Are too..." Ben said and smiled. Richie then found himself enveloped in Ben's arms. He was taken by surprise at first, but soon came to his senses and squeezed Ben back, knowing that he'd miss his friend.

"Make sure to call Bev all the time for me..." Richie muttered into Ben's ear. "Tell her how you feel about her." He could feel Ben stiffen at his words, perhaps in surprise as he had detected Ben's crush on Beverly. "Fuck Bill. He's got nothing on you." At this, Ben pulled back. He stared at Richie, who simply nodded his head once. Ben went to stand with the others, smiling reservedly at what Richie had said.

Richie looked over at Stan, who had his head tilted to the side. "Aww, Stan the Man. I'll miss you more than any of these losers—"

"Richie—!" Stan exclaimed, face flaming.

"I'm kidding!" Richie insisted, his hands raised in surrender. "Anyway..." he went on. "Thanks for dealing with me all these years. Thanks for letting me stay at your house after everything. Thanks for... a lot of things. You really are the man, Stan."

"That was cheesy as hell, Richie..." Stan quipped, rolling his eyes. "You're making it sound like we'll never see each other again. You'll come back at Christmas, right? It'll be the first Losers Club Christmas. You can't miss it, Richie. You better not miss it! If you miss it, I'll take a bus to Hawkins and personally murder you on the behalf of all the others. After I murder you, I'll flee the country and change my identity. I think I'd be—" Stan, after having realized that he had been rambling, cut his own self off. "Sorry..." he muttered as he looked down at his perpetually-clean sneakers.

"Well..." Richie contended. "If I die around Christmastime, the other Losers will know you did it. Now you can't kill me..." Sarcastically, he added, "Good going, Stanley!"

Stan shook his head, smiling.

Then, all of a sudden, Richie rushed forward and wrapped his arms around Stanley, catching both of them off-guard. Stan stood stiffly with his arms at his sides for few seconds before he found it in himself to reciprocate, squeezing Richie back tightly. After several moments, however, he dropped his arms and pulled back, shuffling his feet.

Almost as if provoked by Stan and Richie's separation, the bus rolled

into the station. It was silver with crimson and blue streaks down both sides, the words GREYHOUND stamped on the front. The driver simply pried the door open and looked out at the kids on the platform, her face stoic. No one stepped off the bus— why would anyone want to stop in shithole Derry?

He straightened his specs.

"One second..." Richie mumbled half-attentively to the driver as he turned to Eddie. His heart hammered momentarily. He hadn't exactly planned on running out of time. He had originally wanted to tell Eddie goodbye properly (perhaps a goodbye full of red-faced, pointless banter), but it hadn't turned out that way. He knew he was running out of time— the driver looked pissed-off for having to wait — so he took Eddie by the elbows and said evenly, "Mrs. K is stupid and she can't tell you what to do. Do what you *want* to do, Eds. I'll miss you like crazy, you little rascal..." Before Eddie could respond to his shitty excuse of a pet name, Richie silenced him by promptly wrapping him into his arms— pulling him close. His hands fell down to Eddie's back and stayed there. Eddie, shocked but admittedly alert, lent into the touch, revelling in the warmth that it provided. He melted into the embrace as if it were smooth, rich chocolate. Then, a lone tear trailed down his cheek in realization (*THIS IS A GOODBYE, DUMBASS!* his brain screamed).

But eventually, Richie was forced to pull away. He looked down at Eddie and smiled complacently, saying simply, "Don't forget me, Eddie, my love..."

Eddie fixed him with an irritated look, but replied with, "I won't, that's ridiculous. We'll call each other and I'll see you as soon as I can..."

Richie nodded once to show that he understood. Smiling sadly, he bid the others farewell. He slung his backpack over his shoulder and climbed onto the bus, his worn-out sneakers thudding dully against the ribbed rubber floor. He handed the driver his ticket: DERRY, MAINE - HAWKINS, INDIANA. She scanned it briefly for authenticity and motioned for him to sit somewhere.

He found a window-seat on the station's side easily, for the bus was

almost entirely empty save for several businessmen at the front, an old woman in the middle, and a family toward the back. The driver forced the doors closed. The sound echoed in Richie's head. It was a sound that he will never, ever forget— it was the sound of departure.

He took his seat and set his backpack down onto the floor between his feet. Turning to the window, he could see that his friends were still standing there, scanning the windows of the bus. Mike Hanlon spotted him first and pointed. Six sets of eyes found him and he beamed, sending them a little wave.

MONDAY OCTOBER 29, 1984
DERRY, MAINE
11:38 AM

Wait a second...

Richie had called his new town Hawkins about a billion times. All he had known about his new life at the time were the basics— he knew the address to his new house, he knew his aunt's surname, and he knew their phone number. He was bound to refer to his new town as Hawkins when it was basically all he knew about it.

Hawkins, Indiana.

Eddie's first thought was that someone had purchased and renamed the Derry laundromat, but that wouldn't make any sense. That laundromat had been there for as long as Eddie could remember. He was almost certain that he had seen a marker in there that read: established 1953. It had been there for too long to be renamed without any notice.

Eddie's second thought, though it was absolutely batshit, was the one that stuck. He wasn't in Derry anymore.

It was ridiculous, but he would come to realize that it was true. He didn't recognize any of the stores around the laundromat, nor the store behind him (Melvald's General Store?). Shakily, he pulled himself off the bench. He looked down at himself for the first time since he had awoken, and realized that he had on the outfit of which

he had fallen asleep in— a red crewneck sweater and corduroy slacks. Luckily, he had on shoes. He must've fallen asleep with them on, for some reason.

But he had nothing except for the clothes on his back. That is, until he thought to check his pockets. He was surprised when his fingers met something moderately sharp. Brows furrowed, he pulled out a crumpled sheet of notebook paper. He smoothed it out with his hands and scanned the words that had been scrawled messily across the front:

My New House
Hawkins, Indiana
XXX-XXX-XXXX

The handwriting was so messy and distinct that it could only be that of Richie Tozier.

No matter how much Eddie thought about it, he couldn't remember how in the heck he had put in possession of this specific piece of paper. Sure, Richie had written his new number for Eddie, but that had been scrawled onto his History textbook to ensure that he wouldn't lose it.

He figured that how he got it didn't really matter— as long he had it in the first place.

MONDAY OCTOBER 29, 1984
DERRY, MAINE
4:39 PM

The boy with the bowl-cut was exceptionally kind, Stan came to realize as he was ushered onto the couch beside the fireplace. He was handed several blankets by an older woman that he could only assume to be Bowl-Cut Boy's mother. Richie loomed behind them, gnawing and picking at his chapped lips. In any other situation, Stan would be yelling at him to *stop that* before he made himself bleed. But this, of course, wasn't any other situation.

The redhead had her hand on Richie's shoulder in an attempt to calm

him down. It wasn't working, but he didn't shake her off— he simply let her believe that she was doing something to help. Richie's brother (Stan could distantly recall that his name was Mike as he had learned from his call with Richie the day before) stood beside her, his arms crossed loosely over his chest. He was staring Richie and the redhead with narrowed, skeptical eyes.

There was obviously some tension there.

Stan looked down and realized that someone had handed him a steaming mug of hot chocolate. He brought the cup to his lips and sipped from it, revelling in how it felt as the chocolaty drink warmed his insides as if it were the Seder wine that his mother let him have last Passover. Once he drained the mug about half-way, he brought it back down and smiled contentedly. He looked around the room and realized that the others also had cups of hot chocolate and were also enjoying how it tasted.

Richie let out a sigh of utter delight as he brought the cup down from his lips. "This stuff is so much better than that crap from the Aladdin..." he admitted truthfully, mostly to Stan. "That stuff is just water and cocoa powder. It takes like tap and sewage." The word 'sewage' slipped from his lips before he even realized it. Upon realization, however, he winced.

Stan nodded his head slowly. "Yeah, this is much better..." He turned to Bowl-Cut Boy's mother and added a kind, "Thank you."

"You're welcome, sweetie..." she said with a warm smile. After a moment, she went on, "If you kids don't need anything else, I'll be in the kitchen..." And she walked away, leaving the children with some privacy.

No one said anything for several long-drawn moments— not even Richie. The only sounds were the crackling embers of the fire and Mrs. Byers' retreating, sock-clad footsteps. But, as expected, Richie broke the semi-silence, his face set earnestly. "What are you doing here? Why are you wearing that? What's going on?" he repeated his questions from earlier. It seemed as if Richie had assumed that some warmth could provide Stan with all of the answers. It couldn't, obviously.

"I'm not sure," Stan admitted, a troubled knit in his brows. His eyes fluttered down to rest on his clasped hands. "This is probably gonna sound absolutely crazy, but you *have* to believe me."

Richie nodded fervently. "Of course, I'll believe you..."

But Stan said nothing. Only when Max, Mike, and Will realized that they too had been addressed and nodded their heads along, did Stan continue. "Well, I woke up this morning in the woods— here. I fell asleep in my own bed back in Derry, but this morning, I woke up *here*. I probably walked around the woods for hours before you guys found me."

"So, *that* explains why you're wearing your jammies..." Richie quipped.

Mike scoffed, sending his brother a thoroughly questioning look, "Jammies? Who the hell calls them that?"

"Richie, obviously..." Max pointed out, shrugging.

"That's besides the damn point!" Richie remarked with a firm look in their direction. "Was there any evidence or anything of how you made it here?" *Evidence like orange pom-poms, perhaps?*

"I don't know..." Stan fessed.

"Well... do you think It has *anything* to do with it?" Richie went on to ask.

Mike intervened. "Of course, It has something to do with it!" he insisted as if it were obvious. "You said that It came back. It's *obviously* responsible for this!"

Stan was rather shocked to learn what Mike knew about the previous summer, and turned on him instead, "What the hell?! You know about It?!"

"I forced Richie to tell me, all right?" Mike admitted. His fists were clenched by his sides. He could practically *feel* the anger bubbling in the pit of his stomach. His brain kept telling him to *stop it stop it stop it*, but he couldn't help it. He'd been irritable ever since shit went

down the previous year.

"You didn't force me, dumbass!" Richie attested. "I told you on my own accord tha—"

"But Richie! We made a damn promi—" Stan flared, his eyes flashing dangerously.

"That promise had nothing to do with not telling anyone! That promise was about coming back!"

"Which *you* didn't even do!" Stan shot back.

Hurt flashed on Richie's face. "What the *fuck*, Stanley? You told me that I didn't need to come back! I've barely been here three days and I wanted to spend some time here w—"

"Freaking, Jesus!" Max suddenly screamed. The exasperation in her voice was potent. "I'm sorry, but what the fuck are you guys talking about?" Her and Will had been watching this argument for a while now, completely and utterly lost. When no one said anything, too shocked to reply, she went on, "Is anyone gonna tell me or am I gonna have to *force* it out of you?!"

After a moment, Richie conceded tiredly, "All right, *fine*, Red. I'll tell you. I was gonna hav'ta eventually anyway."

To Richie's surprise, Stan said nothing. He must have seen reason in Richie's insistence to tell the others about what happened back in Derry. It was for the best. If one of Mike's friends randomly saw a blood-thirsty clown on the street, they would know what to do.

Just as Richie had to Mike, he told Max and Will about It and everything in-between.

Stan, however, kept mostly to himself. Recounting everything that happened the previous summer was difficult for him. Just as most kids do, he had blocked out the majority of the things that had scared him too much. He could only remember parts of what happened, but what he did remember was enough to make his heart start to race and his palms to sweat (calliope music played in his dreams... or,

more accurately deemed *nightmares*). It seemed that Richie's memory was far more intact. He must've thought to store last summer's hell within the crevices of his memory.

"Last year, our friend Bill's little brother, Georgie, went missing. Then, more kids started disappearing. So, the summer after Georgie went missing— last summer, I mean— Bill wanted us to look for him because he said that he had narrowed down the clues of where Georgie might have ended up. He made me, Stan, and my other friends look for him, but we all knew that Georgie was already dead. I mean, he'd been gone for almost ten months. We eventually found out that Georgie had been taken and killed by a child-eating clown that lived in the sewers underneath our town."

"What the *hell*, Dick?" Max said suddenly, her voice saturated with utter disbelief. "That's the *stupidest* story I've ever heard in my life. You really expect us to believe that shit?" She looked over at Will. He was staring intently down at his clasped hands, his lips pursed in consideration. He seemed to be mulling the story over— making connections.

"It's *not* made-up! It happened!" Richie looked affronted at the fact that Max didn't believe him. She had been the one to ask him to explain things, so here he was, explaining things. His voice climbed in octave to the point where he sounded like an awfully ticked-off six-year-old girl. "It's real, Max! It's why Stan's here!"

"The clown's real? It eats *children*?" Richie's passion for the issue seemed to have convinced Max rather easily. The thought, of course, was thoughtfully upsetting (killer clowns?), but it seemed that she was starting to believe it.

"Yeah, It's real..." Richie allowed evenly. "And It could shape-shift into our worst fears. It fucked with us for the entire summer. It turns out that the only way to make sure that It doesn't kill you is to convince yourself that you aren't afraid of It because, well, It feeds off of your fear. So, at the end of August, when one of my friends, Beverly, had been taken by It, the rest of my friends and I went down into the sewers and fought it. We thought that we had killed it because it fell into one of the pipes in the cistern, but we didn't know for sure. A little while after, before I left, we made a promise to come

back if It ever came back, too. A blood pact, actually."

He held out his left hand in an offering, the same way that he had back in the Barrens. Max and Will looked down at it. Stan held his cut hand out, too, and let it waver beside Richie's. Their hands, both with jagged scars, were lined up side-by-side. Stan's scar was more clean and precise than Richie's was. That was probably due to the fact that Richie had been of the first to have his palm cut while Stan had been close to last.

"Well, it turns out that It survived the fall and wants to kill us again..." He and Stan let their hands fall back to their sides. "It hasn't necessarily come back to Derry, but It came to Portland, where Bev lives now, and messed with her. She escaped this time. We know now that It can come here, too. To Hawkins. If It brought Stan here, then It can come here, too. Easily. It's probably already here by n—"

"Stop!" Mike exclaimed suddenly, startling the aforementioned. "You're freaking everyone out!"

"Yeah, I'm 'freaking everyone out' with the *truth*!" Richie pointed out as it were obvious. "Someone has to have some reason here! *It's* here and we're all 99.9% sure that It's responsible for Stan being here, too. I mean, it couldn't have been because of anything else, right?"

"Actually, there *is* something..." Will said, and trailed off.

Before he could find it in himself to continue, Mike cut him off sharply, "No, Will, don't!"

Richie looked between the two boys, brows furrowed deeply. "Don't... what?" he demanded. When no one said anything, he went on, "Don't *what*, Mike?! What's something?!"

"It's nothing..." Mike admitted, waving his hands dismissively. *Drop the issue*, his mind pleaded.

"Uh, well it doesn't *sound* like nothing!" Richie bit back.

"Yeah!" Max nodded her head fervently. "Tell us, Wheeler!"

Instead of explaining *calmly* and *passively* like a normal person would,

however, Mike turned on Max and snapped fiercely, "I don't even know why you're here! No one invited you!"

His words set Max off. She had had *enough*. She wouldn't take his insults any longer. "Richie invited me, you dumbass!" she snarled, jabbing an accusatory finger in his vicinity. Her face was flaming, her brows lowered dangerously. "I'm here for Richie and that damn science project!"

"Well, you should've left after we found Stanley! That damn project is over!"

"Then, I'm here to help!"

"Well, you're *not* helping! In fact, you're ruining everything!"

"*Ruining everything?!*" Max echoed. Her voice climbed in octave. "What the *fuck* are you talking about?! You're the one that's ruining everything with your stupid anger issues! Get a hold of yourself, Wheeler!"

"I don't have anger issues! If anyone does, *you* do!" he shot back with fire.

Richie straightened his specs, worried gaze flickering from his brother to his new friend.

"Bullshit! You're the one that started all of this! Why do you hate me so much?!" Max demanded hotly.

"I don't hate you! I don't even *know* you! How could I hate you if I don't even know you?!"

"Well, you're acting like you do! You want me out of here!"

"Yeah, I want yo—!"

There were several harsh knocks on the front door. Everyone fell silent. The echo of Mike's retort dangled dangerously low over their heads. Everyone expected the worst, but, then again, would Pennywise knock? Would the Demogorgon knock?

Will pulled himself to his feet and padded over to the door. He almost turned the doorknob, but realized that he would have to take some sort of precaution. He stood on his tippy-toes and peered through the peephole. When he deemed the person on the other side safe, he turned the knob and pulled the door open. A strong gust of frigid air spilled through, ruffling Will's chestnut-brown hair.

But there, shivering on the Byers' front doorstep, shifting his weight nervously from foot-to-foot, was Eddie-*fucking*-Kaspbrak. At the sight of him, Richie started coughing, loudly and uncontrollably. Stan thumped him on the back, though it was half-attentively. He was staring at Eddie too, completely dumbfounded.

Notes for the Chapter:

i'm cruel. i'm so fucking sorry guys! the next chapter will be up AS SOON AS POSSIBLE! i promise! this week is thanksgiving, so i have to spend some time with my family, but i'll make sure to update when i can! i love you guys so much!

8. missing cases and shocked faces

Notes for the Chapter:

an update? FIVE days after the last one? this is a record!

i know that this chapter is kinda short, but i wanted to keep the last chapter going. this one ends at a decent part without MUCH of a cliffhanger.

thank you! if you celebrated thanksgiving last thursday, i hope you had an amazing one! if not, i hope your thursday was amazing!

Richie Tozier shakily pulled himself to his feet, still hacking away uncontrollably. He stumbled across the room, nearly running Will over in his eagerness to reach Eddie. Will was ultimately forced to take a last-minute step out of the way, his back hitting the wall behind him. Richie, after having choked down his remaining coughs with some difficulty, took Eddie by the elbows and leveled him with watery eyes.

Rose lips parted with shock, Richie could only stare for several seconds. He eventually came to his senses and beamed toothily.

Eddie smiled back, overcome with about a million emotions at once. He had come here because he had that known Richie would be here (or, at least, *strongly* assumed) thanks to Mrs. Wheeler's directions, but he had defiantly not foreseen *this*. Sure, it had only been four days since the last time that they had seen each other, but their goodbye at the bus station had felt, at the time, completely and utterly final. Back then, he had expected that the next time he'd see Richie face-to-face to be Thanksgiving and, if he were being 100% realistic, probably not even then. *Maybe* at Christmas.

"What the fuck..." Richie breathed out in shock. Cursing, it seemed, had always been his knee-jerk reaction to things of which he couldn't quite understand the reason behind. He shook his head several times as if he couldn't believe what he was seeing to be true. Then,

unexpectedly, he surged forward and wrapped Eddie tightly into his arms.

"Well said, Trashmouth," Eddie commented lightly, his voice soft and breathy. Though this thought made him feel distantly ashamed, he revelled in the feeling of being encompassed in Richie's arms. "A memorable moment made perfect."

"I...I..." Richie stammered uncertainly, pulling back so that he could look Eddie squarely in the eyes. "What are you doing here? W..." he trailed off in realization. Their stare broke as he looked over his shoulder and at Stan, who had been watching them with raised brows and an obnoxious smirk on his face. Richie looked back down at Eddie and said dismissively, "It doesn't matter. Only that you're here."

Eddie nodded half-attentively. Richie's stare was not met with Eddie's, however, for Eddie proved to be preoccupied. He was not looking back at Richie, but rather across the room. His searching eyes had landed on another head of curly black hair. "Wha..." he breathed out shakily. "What's going on?"

Richie turned to follow his eyes, and realization set in.

With his hand on the small of Eddie's back, he led him across the room. Will shut the door behind Eddie and ambled over to his friends, crossing his arms loosely over his chest as he observed.

"This..." Richie announced, motioning lazily toward Mike. "Is my identical twin brother. Turns out I was adopted by Mama and Papa Tozier, after all. This is Mike. Last name Wheeler, not Hanlon."

Eddie, still unbelievably short of breath and, well, baffled, stuck out his hand. "I'm Eddie..." he said resolutely. "Admittedly of Derry."

All he could think about was how... *bizarre* this whole thing was. He was face-to-face with not Richie, but someone who looked *almost* exactly like him; sans for, of course, the coke-bottle specs and the outlandish fashion sense. This boy looked much more put-together, he realized, perhaps because of his upbringing— his influences.

Mike smiled and Eddie was suddenly struck with how... *pretty* he was.

Personally, he had always liked how Richie looked without his specs — how *vulnerable* and *soft* he looked. He squashed down the feeling before he could feel guilty.

"I'm Mike Wheeler..." he introduced himself matter-of-factly, pumping Eddie's hand several times. "Admittedly of Hawkins..." *God*, even his voice sounded like Richie's, though it came out much softer.

Richie let out a low whistle, intrigued eyes flickering between his brother and his best friend. "This is batshit crazy. Insane."

Max rolled her eyes in response. "That's it!" she exclaimed suddenly, splaying out her hands in surrender. "I'm revoking your privileges of using the word batshit. Fucking gross. You say it too much."

"Well, if you take that away, Red, you can't say 'fuck' anymore," Richie shot back smartly.

"Ah, touché. Touché," She admitted defeat, brows raised appraisingly. Then, she turned to address Eddie. With a warm smile, she introduced both herself and her bowl-cut-wearing friend. "I'm Max and this is Will."

"Eddie," he said once more.

"Nah, his name's Eds..." Richie cut in, waving his hands dismissively. "He's only being formal. These are my *friends*, Eds, you can tell them what everyone calls you!"

"Eddie's already my nickname, jackass. My nickname doesn't need a nickname!"

"Why, that's ridiculous! Yo—"

Stan, who had obviously *had it* with Richie's antics, cut in exasperatingly, "Goddammit, Richie! There are more important things happening right now!"

In his ridiculous Bugs Bunny Voice, he said, "Whatever ya say, Doc..." as he fell back onto the couch beside his friend.

Eddie sunk onto the cushion beside Richie, rubbing his nose wearily.

Max fell into an arm chair, and Will and Mike took their seats in respective wicker chairs that Mrs. Byers had taken out for them earlier. Their hot chocolate was long forgotten.

"Do you remember anything about how you got here?" Stan asked Eddie in earnest. Absently, he twirled a single ringlet of his sandy blonde hair around his index finger, satisfying one of his many nervous ticks.

"Wait a second, the same thing happened to you?" Eddie looked alarmed, to say the very least. His face had lost most of its color.

"Yeah, I woke up in the woods, walked 'round for a while, and they eventually found me. Them finding me was more of a coincidence than anything else. I was scared for my life, though, I can tell you that much."

Eddie nodded somberly. "Well, I woke up on a wooden park bench near the Hawkins Laundromat. I realized almost immediately that this place was the town where Richie had moved. Coincidentally, his phone number was in my pocket. I looked up the phone number in the Yellow Pages and found where he lived. I ran into a woman there and she told me that Richie was at his friend Will's house. She wrote down Will's address and told me where to head off and... here I am."

"I didn't put my number in your pocket. I wrote it down in your History textbook so that you wouldn't lose it," Richie said.

"Well, it was in *your* handwriting," Eddie said as he fished the note out of his pocket. He handed the crumbled note over to Richie, who smoothed it out and scrutinized it carefully. It was, in fact, his handwriting, but he can't for the life of him remember actually writing it. He had given each of the Losers copies of his new number, but none of them had been signed like this one. Everyone's note had been signed with their name (or, at least, their nickname). He also knew that none of the notes had been signed with 'Hawkins, Indiana' as this one was.

My New House
Hawkins, Indiana
XXX-XXX-XXXX

"I didn't write this," Richie revealed. He stood by his ruling— this was not his. "I couldn't have. I don't remember writing it."

Eddie, not wanting to cross Richie, but *also* not knowing what to believe, simply nodded along. "Maybe, yanno, *It* was involved with this in some way."

"Maybe it *wanted* us to find each other," Stan added.

"Well, what about the others?" Richie asked. "What if they're here, too?"

"Well, it would make sense for them to be here, but I wouldn't know for sure."

"Why don't we just call them?" Eddie blurted, suddenly struck with the idea. "If Bill's home, he'll answer. Without a doubt. Will, can we use your phone?"

Will, obviously very willing to be of help to them, nodded fervently. "Yeah, sure, follow me," he insisted as he pulled himself to his feet. Richie, Stan, Eddie, Mike, and Max followed him through his quaint, one-story home until they reached the paneled wall of held his old rotary telephone.

"Richie, why don't you do it?" Stan offered. "He'll want to hear from you."

"I... don't really remember his phone number," he admitted truthfully. He looked ashamed as he diverted his eyes to his sneakers.

"I do, but you have to talk to him— explain things," Stan insisted as he reached for the telephone and dialed in Bill's number. When the dial tone could be heard through it, he passed it along to Richie, who shakily held it to his ear and listened.

The line clicked and eventually a staticy voice broke through, "Hello? Thuh-This is Bill Denbrough spuh-speaking."

"Holy shit, Billiam!" Richie exclaimed, faintly relieved to hear his friend's voice.

However, having learned that Bill's location was still unceremoniously Derry, Eddie and Stan wore matching looks of bewilderment.

"Rih-Rih-Richie? Oh my *Guh-Guh-God!* Shuh-Shuh-Shit's happened here that you *nuh-nuh-need* to know!"

"Here, too! Quick question: when's the last time you saw Stan and Eddie?"

"I wuh-was just about tuh-to tell you! Thuh-They went muh-muh-missing last night! Buh-Buh-Ben, too!"

"Wait... Ben went missing, too?" Richie demanded. His brows vanished underneath his crown of dark curls.

Eddie went wide-eyed whilst Stan bit down his lip.

"*Yuh-Yeah...*" Bill said slowly, his tone twinged with skepticism. "Whuh-Whuh-Why aren't yuh-you muh-muh-more cuh-concerned about Stuh-Stan and Eh-Eh-Eh-Eddie? And... 'tuh-tuh-too'?"

"Probably 'cuz they're standing right beside me..."

"Wh-What?!" Bill shouted so loud into the telephone that Richie was forced to pull the it away from his ear in order save his eardrums from permanent damage. "Whuh-What about Buh-Buh-Ben? Ih-Is he not thuh-thuh-there, too?"

"No, we don't know where he is, but we have a suspicion that he's somewhere here in Hawkins."

"Wuh-Well that nuh-nuh-narrows it down," Bill drawled sarcastically. "Fuh-Fuh-Find him!"

"We will, smartass!"

"Suh-Suh-Says you!"

Stan, sounding genuinely exasperated, cut in, "Stay on topic!" He took the phone from Richie and pressed it against his own ear, intervening, "What about the other Losers? Do you know where they

are?"

"Yeah, I juh-just talked to Bev and tuh-tuh-told her about you guh-guh-guys being muh-muh-missing. She said shuh-she's cuh-catching the nuh-nuh-next bus to Derry. Muh-Muh-Mike's the one that tuh-tuh-told me about yuh-you and Eddie being muh-muh-missing. Eddie's muh-muh-mom had gone cruh-crazy..." After a moment, he added, "And I'm suh-suh-sorry ah-ah-about my duh-duh-damn stutter. Thuh-Thuh-This is whuh-what huh-huh-happens whuh-whuh-when..."

"I know, Bill. It's fine," Stan insisted because it really didn't matter. Bill would overcome his stutter one day, Stan knew it. It was only bad when he was stressed out and he had a perfectly plausible reason to be right about now. Stan couldn't blame him. If he had a stutter like Bill did, it'd be particularly bad right about now, too.

Suddenly, Eddie chimed in, "Let me talk to him!" Stan nodded briskly and handed the phone over to Eddie, who held it to his ear and demanded, "What did my mom do? Does she have to police involved? Am I a 'missing person' yet? I'll fucking *kill* someone if I am!"

"Juh-Juh-Jesus, Eddie!" Bill exclaimed. "To tell you the truh-truh-truth, your mom *huh-huh-has* gone cruh-cruh-crazy. She filed a muh-muh-missing person's report, but it's not vuh-vuh-valid yet since it hasn't been luh-luh-long enough. The police thuh-thuh-think you ran away with Stuh-Stan and Ben and I thuh-thuh-think that one of the fuh-fuh-first places they'll chuh-check is Hawkins since Mrs. K knuh-knuh-knows about Rih-Rih-Richie. I wouldn't be suh-suh-surprised if the police showed up at your duh-door, by the way. Be cuh-cuh-careful, Ed."

"Holy shit! I don't wanna be arrested!" Eddie squeaked. If it was even possible, his face had lost even *more* color.

"You wuh-won't be arrested— not if you muh-muh-make sure you aren't cuh-cuh-caught..." Bill insisted cryptically.

"That sounds like something a criminal would say!"

Richie, impacted by Eddie's sudden switch in demeanor, set his hand on Eddie's shoulder in an attempt to comfort him. Eddie started and

veered his head around to look at Richie, wide-eyed. "Calm down, Eds. What's Bill saying?" His tone was rational and level, which were emotions that he seldom showed others.

Eddie turned on him, the phone held loosely in his left hand. "My mom has the police looking for all of us! Bill says they'll probably have the police from here looking, too! We're gonna be *arrested*!"

"We won't be arrested," Mike chimed in for the first time in a while. Stan, Eddie, and Richie had, to tell the truth, completely forgotten that Mike and his friends were even here in the first place. "The police here *suck*. And if shit happens, Will and I know the Chief of Police. We'll weasel our way out of punishment."

Bill, who heard this faintly through the veil of the telephone, demanded abruptly, "Who wuh-was that?!"

Eddie winced as he brought the telephone back to his ear. "Uh, no one," he answered weakly.

"That wuh-was obviously suh-suh-someone— suh-suh-someone who *knuh-knuh-knows*."

Richie took the phone from Eddie. "That was my identical twin brother, Mike. He and two of his friends know about It."

Max scoffed. She was in no way, shape, or form friends with Mike Wheeler.

"I had to tell them. Ever since Stanley called me about It finding Beverly, I knew that I had to warn someone here. I told Mike yesterday, but when we found Stan today, I was forced to tell his friends, too. I'm sorry if you don't like that I told people about It. I *had* to. It obviously has something to do with Eddie, Stan, and Ben suddenly showing up here."

Bill said nothing for several long-drawn moments. Then, he addressed the situation, "It's all ruh-ruh-right if you tuh-tuh-tell people. It's nuh-nuh-nessessary. Ih-It's for puh-puh-people's safety."

"Thanks for understanding, then."

"Ruh-Ruh-Right, you're wuh-welcome. Now, fuh-find Ben buh-before I'm fuh-forced to tuh-take the bus over thuh-thuh-there..." Bill cautioned. "And cuh-cuh-call me whuh-when you find him. Nuh-Not if. *When*."

"Yeah, 'bye, Billiam."

"Bye, Rih-Rich." The line was severed. Richie set the phone back down on the receiver and turned to his friends.

"We have to find our friend Ben. He's *somewhere* in Hawkins, we know that much. All we gotta do is *think* like Ben would."

Notes for the Chapter:

more reddie 2 is coming!

also, i'm sorry that max, will, and mike didn't talk much this chapter, it was more loser-centric. more ships are to come next chapter, AND i'm planning on adding more characters :)

hope your morning/afternoon/night is amazing!